AL-MA'MÛN: *MIḤNA* AND CALIPHATE

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PREFACE

In the year 212 A.H./827 A.D., the seventh 'Abbâsid caliph, al-Ma'mûn, made public his view on a religious doctrine, that the Koran was created, and six years later, he ordered an inquisition (*miḥna*) using the doctrine as the touchstone. These two events, at once unique in Islam and at odds with what we know about the caliph, are the concern of this study.

The study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 is introductory and starts off by presenting a succinct statement of the aim of the study, followed by an overview of a number of topics and concepts as aid for placing the two events of concern within a broad yet directly relevant historical context.

Naturally, the declaration of the doctrine and the *miḥna* did not occur in a vacuum. Their coming into existence was a product of interactions between al-Ma'mûn, a man and a caliph, and the constant flow of events which he had to master or at least cope with. Chapter 2 will sketch the highlights of the caliph's life and government and places the issues of concern to this study within the totality of the major events which took place during his long reign.

Chapter 3 describes the three most prevalent explanations of the caliph's declaration that the Koran was created and of the *miḥna* edict. The rationale of the study lies precisely in the fact that the very proponents of these explanations are skeptical that their versions do complete justice to all known facts or have sufficient sway to put the matter to rest. Chapter 3 delineates also the manner in which these three competing explanations will be reexamined in this research and the ways in which it differs from those which preceded it. The findings are presented and discussed in chapters 4 and 5. The dissertation closes with a summary, the main conclusions and some suggestions for further research.

The dissertation is addressed not only to Islamicists and Arabists but to the general historian as well. Consequently, all Arabic terms used have been translated into English.

The transliteration system used is that of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* except that the "k̲" is substituted by the "q". The new edition of the *Encyclopaedia* is indicated by "*EI2*" and the earlier version by "*EI1*".

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This endeavor is lovingly dedicated to my mother and father; a child could not wish for better parents.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Aim of the study

'Abdallâh al-Ma'mûn shares with his father, Hârûn al-Rashîd (r. 170/786-193/809), the honor of spearheading what has come to be known as the Golden Age of Islam. One particular event stands out as having marred the glory of al-Ma'mûn. After having declared, in 212/827, a religious doctrine that the Koran was created, the caliph issued a decree, the *miḥna*, expressly directed at enforcing the doctrine. The *miḥna* is a sort of "inquisition" and the date of its issuance is Rabî' I, 218/March-April, 833, the year the caliph died.

The use of force in implementing a religious doctrine is a novelty in Islam. While al-Ma'mûn was not the first to consider "heretic" those views which contradicted his own, the *miḥna* which he initiated was, however, "the first systematic inquisition into heresy and the earliest formal attempt to stamp it out" (Hitti 1970, 430).[1] It runs counter to the tradition, spirit and indeed the letter of the Islamic religion.[2] Not only did al-Ma'mûn – allegedly a deeply religious man – violate the prescriptions of Islam by his innovation but also the issuance of the *miḥna* decree is incompatible with the freedom of thought which he is believed to have championed. The intolerance which the *miḥna* symbolizes, contrasts sharply with the caliph's tolerance, indeed, with his encouragement of religious debates between Islamic scholars and their counterparts from other faiths, monotheists and polytheists alike. One may then assume that al-Ma'mûn must have had compelling forces to drive him to issue his decree. It is the fathoming of these motives that this investigation defines as its aim.

1.2. An overview of the broader context

Five topics will be discussed in this paragraph. The first is the very broad topic of the caliphate (Orthodox, Umayyad, and 'Abbâsid). The major divisions in Islam, Sunnite and Shi'ite, will be dealt with next. Then, in succession, follow the Mu'tazilites, the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran and, finally, the *miḥna*.

Many studies have been written on the first three of these topics. It is also a matter of record that there exist numerous versions relating to especially the caliphates and the religious sects. Some of these have been purposefully "doctored" to suit special aims. Aiding the reader to place the events of direct concern to this study in a broad context – which is our purpose – calls for no more than a "nodding acquaintance" with the caliphates, the Sunnite-Shi'ite divide and Mu'tazilism.

1.2.1. The caliphates

The word "caliph" comes from the Arabic *khalîfa*, meaning "successor" or "deputy".[3] In this case, it refers to those men who succeeded the Prophet Muhammad (570-11/632) in his capacity as spiritual and temporal leader of the Islamic *Umma* (Community) and the territories occupied or subjugated by Islamic forces.[4] Of relevance to this study are (a) the Or-thodox caliphate; (b) the Umayyad caliphate of Damascus, beginning with Mu'âwiya (r. 41/661-60/680) and ending with Marwân II (r. 127/744-32/750); and (c) the 'Abbâsid caliphate of Baghdad, starting with the first in the dynasty, Abû al-'Abbâs (al-Saffâh) (r. 132/749-136/754) and ending with al-Mutawakkil III who died in 945/1538.[5]

1.2.1.1. The Orthodox caliphate

The Orthodox caliphate encompasses the term of office of the first four caliphs – Abû Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmân and 'Alî – who are also called the Rightly-Guided caliphs (*al-khulafâ' al-râshidûn*). Abû Bakr (r. 11/632-13/634), the first of the caliphs in Islam, is traditionally believed to have also been the first to use the title of *khalîfa* (*khalîfat rasûl Allâh*) – or successor to the messenger of God. He belonged to the Meccan tribe of Quraysh of which the Prophet was a member as well. Abû Bakr, father of 'Â'isha, a wife of the Prophet, was nominated and chosen for the post by notables of the Community. Before the choice could be sealed by an oath of allegiance (*bay'a*), it had to be ratified by the other Muslims.[6] However, 'Alî b. Abî Tâlib claimed the right to succeed Muhammad and held back his consent for several months after Abû Bakr's ratification. Those people who supported the claim of 'Alî were to form the nucleus of what later came to be called the Shi'ites – a group to be described later in this chapter. During Abû Bakr's short tenure, this caliph was primarily concerned with the *ridda* (secession, apostasy) wars from which he emerged victorious.[7]

Of the four caliphs who succeeded the Prophet, all except Abû Bakr died as a result of assassination. Abû Bakr was succeeded by 'Umar b. al-Khattâb (r. 13/634-23/644). This second caliph was more effective in expanding the boundaries of Islam and organizing its affairs than any of the

other three Orthodox caliphs. This success was partly due to 'Umar's relatively long tenure (longer than the reigns of Abû Bakr and 'Alî combined) and to a much larger measure to his qualities as a person and leader. In addition to the title of *khalîfa*, 'Umar reportedly adopted "*amîr al-mu'minîn*" (commander of the faithful), a formal title which became as standard as that of *khalîfa* itself.

'Uthmân b. 'Affân (r. 23/644-35/656), who was a son-in-law of the Prophet, was almost sixty when chosen as third of the Rightly-Guided caliphs. He was a weak leader and his favoritism to his kinsmen (the Umayyads) did not help to advance the cause of Islam. Thanks only to the momentum of 'Umar's expansion, 'Uthmân's forces made some additions (notably Cyprus) to the Islamic domain. 'Uthmân met his death in Medina at the hands of a band of a rebelling party from Egypt – a territory that had already been won by Islamic forces;[8] the party in question was led by the son of the first caliph Abû Bakr.

'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib (r. 35/656-40/661) was born around 600 A.D. He had more links to the Prophet than any of his predecessors. 'Alî embraced Islam when he was still a youth; was adopted by Muḥammad and educated under his care; was given in marriage his daughter, Fâṭima, the only child to survive the Prophet; and he was a first paternal cousin of Muḥammad. While 'Alî's bid to succeed his father-in-law had failed a generation earlier, his ascension to the fourth caliphate did not occur without a bitter fight either. And it was a divisive fight in which no less a notable figure than the favorite wife of the Prophet ('Â'isha) had taken part against 'Alî before he finally won. This is the rift which laid the cornerstone for the lasting Shi'ite-Sunnite divide.

The contest for the caliphate was between 'Alî and Mu'âwiya,[9] a relative of 'Uthmân and a governor of Syria since 'Umar had appointed him to that post. The undercurrent of dissension and antagonism from other factions as well never vanished throughout 'Alî's tenure. As a result of incessant disturbances, 'Alî finally lost his life in al-Kûfa, the city (in Iraq) he had made his capital, by the poisoned arrow of an assassin. The era of the Orthodox caliphs was over.

1.2.1.2. The Umayyad caliphate.

'Alî, rising to power as he did on a wave of factious rebellions and powerful dissent, faced opposition from the well-organized forces of Mu'âwiya b. Abî Sufyân. After the battles which preceded and followed the death of 'Alî, the latter's son al-Ḥasan – designated by his supporters as successor to 'Alî – finally abdicated in favor of his rival Mu'âwiya. Mu'âwiya (r. 41/661-60/680) was proclaimed caliph in Jerusalem. The dynasty was named after Mu'âwiya's great-grandfather Umayya (of Quraysh), and

Damascus became its capital.[10] Mu'âwiya's choice of Damascus was a logical one, for Syria was a bastion of his military strength and he had allied himself, through marriage, with the dominant tribe of the region, the Banû Kalb.

Two circumstances, both a legacy of the Orthodox caliphs, confronted Mu'âwiya: The brisk expansion of Islam outside the Arab peninsula and incessant inter-Arab tribal frictions. The first of these did not present any insurmountable problems.[11] The tide and momentum were on Mu'âwiya's side, as can be seen by the fact that his armies were to reach the Atlantic only one year after his death. The tribal frictions and rivalries,[12] the other problem, were to prove far more intractable. But, thanks to the person of Mu'âwiya, the situation was well-contained during his rule.

Historians agree that Mu'âwiya was a man of vast intelligence and almost limitless patience. He was a master of diplomacy, of pragmatism, of calculation and also a master of his personal feelings. Though Mu'âwiya *"al-dâhiya"* (the sly old fox), as he was called, never shunned the use of force to get his way, he is said to have always preferred to solve problems by peaceful means.[13]

Mu'âwiya's rise to power was a deep humiliation to the Shi'ites and a frustrating blow to their repeatedly uttered claims that the progeny of 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib (the 'Alids) are the rightful successors to the Prophet. The 'Alids' cousins – another wing of the clan of Banû Hâshim – who later founded the 'Abbâsid caliphate on the ruins of the Umayyads', were also at odds with Mu'âwiya.

Despite this opposition, a good degree of pacification of tribal disputes had been achieved through Mu'âwiya's application of his talents. He succeeded in forging alliances, however fragile, through marriages, gifts and appointments but also through kindness, generosity of spirit and the willingness and ability to overlook personal slights even when made in public.

Anticipating that serious trouble was likely to erupt in the scramble for a successor upon his death, and realizing that the old Arab method of electing a leader for an empire so vast and complex was neither practicable nor predictable, Mu'âwiya solved the problem by introducing for the first time the system of hereditary succession into the caliphate. He sealed this by having notables swear allegiance to his son (Yazîd I) as successor. With the line of heredity as a basis for ascent to the caliphate, the tradition of consensual choice became history.[14]

Umayyad rule in Damascus lasted some 90 years. Twenty of these were filled by Mu'âwiya and the rest by thirteen other caliphs. Except for the dynasty's founder, two others left an impact on history: 'Abd al-Malik (r. 65/685-86/705), noted especially for introducing Arabic as the official

administrative language of the empire and standardizing the coinage system, and 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azîz (r. 99/717-101/720), who was known as being deeply religious, ascetic and humane and whose sense of justice reportedly matched only that of the man whose name he acquired – 'Umar (b. al-Khaṭṭâb), the second Orthodox caliph. Probably as a consequence of this image, 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azîz's grave was the only Umayyad one not desecrated by the 'Abbâsids after they came to power.

1.2.1.3. The 'Abbâsid caliphate

At the turn of the eighth century A.D., the Shi'ites started a serious propaganda campaign denouncing the injustices and infidelity of the Umayyads and the coming of a savior (*al-mahdî*) from the house of the Prophet to deliver them from the iniquities. A freedman from al-Kûfa, named Abû Muslim, had all the makings of a gifted leader able to gain the support of especially many Khurasanian notables and convert them to Islam.[15]

Another group, the 'Abbâsids, were just as eager as the 'Alids and their Shi'ite following to see an end to Umayyad rule. The 'Abbâsids were cousins of the 'Alids, as stated earlier, and the Banû Hâshim clan of both was envious of the greater influence which the Umayyads had had in the pre-Islamic era. They also resented their opponents' antagonism to Islam when it first dawned (the Umayyads were relatively late joiners) and what they saw as their usurpation of power from the Banû Hâshim.

Three groups – 'Abbâsids, Shi'ites, Khurasanians – found themselves united in opposition to their common enemy, the Umayyads.[16] There were numerous rebellions, in-group fighting, and promises made only to be broken. The 'Abbâsids appeared gaining the upper hand. However, the 'Alids and their partisans were growing restive, for they wanted more than implicit recognition that they were the rightful successors to the Prophet. Abû al-'Abbâs (al-Saffâḥ) and his brother Abû Dja'far (al-Manṣûr), like their propagandists, made an effort to win over Shi'ite support. These moves allayed Shi'ite concerns that the post-Umayyad caliphate might become monopolized by the 'Abbâsids. As it turned out, however, their optimism was completely unfounded. On November 28, 749/12 Rabî' II, 132, Abû al-'Abbâs was declared caliph in al-Kûfa; one year later Marwân II was pursued into Syria where the final blow to Umayyad rule was dealt.[17]

During his brief reign (132/749-136/754), the first 'Abbâsid caliph al-Saffâḥ directed his efforts at consolidating his power and neutralizing his opponents.[18] He entrusted the various regions of the realm to his relatives except for Khurasan which he placed under the governorship of Abû Muslim, the man who had succeeded in uniting notably the 'Abbâsids and

'Alids and whose support had been indispensable for securing the caliphate. However, when opportunity arose, Abû Dja'far al-Mansûr (the second 'Abbâsid caliph who ruled from 136/754 till 158/775)[19] removed his overmighty subordinate Abû Muslim by executing him when the unsuspecting governor called at his court upon al-Mansûr's summons. Some of the Khurasanians rebelled, but they were no match for al-Mansûr. The Khurasanians were neutralized without much difficulty – unlike the 'Alids and Shi'ites who continued to rebel for decades to come and never ceased to press their claims to the caliphate despite suppressions which were quite brutal at times.

On paper at least, the 'Abbâsid caliphate lasted eight centuries. Its effective power, however, was just as short as the span of the Umayyad rule. The 'Abbâsid caliphate began to show clear signs of weakness soon after the short-lived "golden age of Islam" (the caliphates of al-Rashîd and al-Ma'mûn) was over. It then entered a long period of continuous decline – sometimes blamed on the so-called "Persianization of the 'Abbâsid caliphate" and then on the influence of Turks among others.

1.2.2. The two major divisions in Islam: Sunnites and Shi'ites

There are two major religious divisions in Islam which still exist, the Sunnites and the Shi'ites. In what follows, we will center on those issues, within each of the two divisions, which are of direct relevance to this study. Before the account is presented, a semantic issue needs to be addressed.

1.2.2.1. A clarification of semantics

The Sunnites derive their name from the Arabic word *sunna* which means "path" (implying the path of the Prophet).[20] The *Sunna* is known to posterity by what the *muḥaddithûn* or *ahl al-ḥadîth* (the transmitters of tradition) have recorded about the sayings, conduct and practices of the Prophet. Over the years, the traditionists tended to become equated by especially non-Arab writers with "conservatives" – which is only partially accurate. This has come about in part because the English word "tradition" has a connotation of past-orientedness and conservatism, and, in part, because it was the transmitters' task to deal with the past.[21] Equally misleading is *ahl al-sunna*[22] which is sometimes used as a synonym for traditionists. To avoid any confusion, in referring to traditionists I shall only use the word traditionists or its Arabic equivalents, *muḥaddithûn*, *ahl al-ḥadîth*.

The term "Shi'ite" refers to those Muslims who believe that a member of the family of the Prophet is the legitimate leader of the Community (a political aspect). Shi'ite also refers to the adherents to that body of doc-

trines which set this Islamic group apart from other subgroups (a religious aspect).

The words "'Alid" and "Ṭâlibid" refer to the descendants of 'Alî (b. Abî Ṭâlib) and his father Abû Ṭâlib respectively. The vast majority of Shi'ites believe that it is an 'Alid who should lead the Community, variably giving precedence to the Ḥasanids (descendants of 'Alî's son al-Ḥasan), to the Ḥusaynids (descendants of 'Alî's other son al-Ḥusayn) or to descendants from other branches of this family. It was possible for someone to be an 'Alid without necessarily having been a Shi'ite.

It is very important to note that the Sunnite and Shi'ite wings of Islam in their canonical form as we now more or less know them, only came into being toward the end of the third/ninth century.[23] A retrojection, frequent though it is, of these terms to an earlier period is strictly speaking inaccurate.

1.2.2.2. The Sunnites

In general, the Sunnites hold the view that the caliphate is an elective office whose occupant does not necessarily have to be a member of the family of the Prophet Muḥammad. Inasmuch as the four Orthodox caliphs were elected to the office, their caliphates as well as the order of their ascension to the post, are subscribed to by the Sunnites.

The Koran is accepted by all Muslims as an authoritative source of doctrine and guide to practice. And so is the *ḥadîth*, but with a difference: the Sunnites have six canonical collections of *ḥadîth* while the Shi'ites have their own collections. All these compilations have their origins in the diligent work of the *ahl al-ḥadîth* who collected and preserved what the Prophet had allegedly said or how he had behaved.

In addition to the Koran and *ḥadîth*, most Sunnites add *idjmâ'* and *qiyâs* as two other sources of authority. Collectively, these four sources, whose elaboration and expansion owes much to the famous jurist al-Shâfi'î (150/767-204/820), constitute the *uṣûl al-fiqh* or the roots of jurisprudence. *Idjmâ'* means "consensus" or "universal consent".[24] Its status as a fundamental pillar of doctrine is grounded in a *ḥadîth* in which the Prophet is believed to have said "My people will never agree in an error".[25] Speaking in general terms, *qiyâs* means "analogy", a process by which a belief or practice is justified on the ground of something similar but not identical in the Koran, *ḥadîth* or *idjmâ'*.[26] *Qiyâs* was often thought of as a check on the private opinion (*ra'y*) of a scholar. As in the case of *idjmâ'*, there were many wrangles among theologians as to the applicability and limits of *qiyâs*. Some would apply *qiyâs* only to concrete, material similarity while others thought that similarity of motives, causes or other abstract deductions was legitimate as well.

There are differences in law and ritual which divide the four major Sunnite groupings which still exist to this day and whose beginnings were established by the third/ninth century: Ḥanafite, Mâlikite, Shâfi'ite and Ḥanbalite. In the main, the most "literalist" of these are the Ḥanbalites. Leaders and proponents of these four schools of law assiduously cultivated the various branches of Islamic theology and jurisprudence and trained thousands of *'ulamâ'* (learned men) in centers at Baghdad, Damascus, Kairouan and Cordova among others; al-Azhar University of Cairo still preserves some of the characteristics of these early seats of learning.

1.2.2.3. The Shi'ites

The word *shî'a* means "group" or "party". The term acquired a special and charged meaning when 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib and his partisans (the *shî'at 'Alî*) sought to achieve what they thought was their rightful due, the immediate succession of the Prophet's son-in-law as the first caliph.[27]

The word "Shi'ite" implies more unity than there ever was in reality.[28] 'Ârif (1987) speaks of 82 Shi'ite groupings, which scholars have classified into four main categories.[29] Of these, the largest, which comprises 34 subgroups, are the Imâmites, usually known by their later name as the Twelver Shi'ites. The second largest are the Zaydites, a category that embraces some twenty groups. Differences in doctrine, teachings and ritual form the basis upon which these necessarily rough and overlapping categorizations have been made. In one sentence, the Shi'ites differ from all other Muslim groups in that they believe that the leader of the Community must meet a number of strict criteria; what these criteria are determines the particular characteristics of the various Shi'ite groupings.

It is an article of faith for most Shi'ites that the caliphate is a hereditary office which is restricted to 'Alî and his descendants from his marriage to Fâṭima after him. While 'Alî was and is so revered by the Shi'ites, two of his sons – al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn – were raised to "sainthood" as well. They owe this status to their parentage and their martyrdom.

Shi'ite doctrine generally teaches that the superhuman powers and qualities of the Prophet descended to the immediate members of his house, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, via their mother Fâṭima – the Prophet's daughter. Accordingly, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn and their progeny are preeminently able to interpret the will of God. These powers, it should be added, are the characteristics of the *imâm*; this specification draws a distinct line between most Sunnites who rely on the consensus (*iḏjmâ'*) of the Community and the Shi'ites who place the authority on religious matters in the hands of the *imâm*s.

The term *imâm* is the Shi'ites' designation for the "true caliph" of whom the first three were 'Alî, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. All those men whom the Sunnite version of history recognizes as caliphs – at least from Mu'âwiya onward – are, accordingly, considered by the Shi'ites to have been "false caliphs".[30] Since the Shi'ites believed the "true caliph" to be inspired by God and able to read His will, they taught that he was naturally entitled to unquestioned obedience and absolute authority.

The Shi'ites' special usage of the term *imâm* is grounded in a messianic and eschatological belief in the imminent coming of the last *imâm* before the end of the world to restore the true and legitimate caliphate. This last, prospective *imâm* is called *al-mahdî* (mentioned earlier) meaning the "one who is (divinely) guided." According to mainstream Twelver Shi'ite doctrine, *al-mahdî* had gone into hiding around the year 260/873-4. Between al-Ḥusayn, the third *imâm*, and al-Mahdî, eight other *imâm*s have been identified; after making himself known to the world, al-Mahdî will be the twelfth – hence the name "Twelvers", a designation for the great bulk of the Shi'ites.[31]

When 'Alî died in 40/661, his supporters declared him a *shahîd* (martyr), and the town of Nadjaf (in present-day Iraq) in which he was interred, became a holy shrine for the Shi'ites. Upon 'Alî's death, his older son al-Ḥasan was declared by the Shi'ites as his successor. Then there ensued the contest between him and his main rival Mu'âwiya – as we have already seen. Al-Ḥasan held out for a while but finally abdicated, acknowledged the caliphate of Mu'âwiya and retired to Medina where he died around the year 49/669-70. Claiming that the *imâm* al-Ḥasan was poisoned at the instigation of Mu'âwiya or his men, the Shi'ites proclaimed al-Ḥasan also a *shahîd*.

Approximately the same set of events shaped the destiny and final fate of al-Ḥusayn. When Yazîd I assumed the caliphate in 60/680 upon the death of his father Mu'âwiya, al-Ḥusayn refused to acknowledge him. Al-Ḥusayn ended his retirement by answering the invitation of his supporters in al-Kûfa to claim his right to the "true caliphate". Vastly outnumbered by the Umayyad forces, al-Ḥusayn was killed at Karbalâ' (near al-Kûfa) on the tenth day of Muḥarram in 61 A.H. (October 10, 680). When al-Ḥusayn's head, which had been sent to Yazîd in Damascus was returned, al-Ḥusayn was buried in Karbalâ'. The Shi'ites declared al-Ḥusayn a *shahîd* (martyr) and Karbalâ' a holy shrine. From then on till the present day, the Shi'ites commemorate the occasion of al-Ḥusayn's death by observing the first ten days (*'âshûrâ'*) of the month of Muḥarram as "days of lamentation".

One of the other four larger Shi'ite groups that is of direct interest to this research are the Zaydites. Generally speaking, the Zaydites differ

from the Twelvers in that they do not believe in one specific line of succession for the *imâm*s or that the *imâm* is free from error. For the Zaydites, any member of the House of 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib is acceptable as leader of the Community and some groupings amongst them accept as leader any member of the House of the Prophet. The *imâm* who leads the Community earns this position by personal merit and by taking up the sword to assume his authority.

1.2.3. The Mu'tazilites

The Arabic word *i'tizâl* has a variety of meanings of which "separatism" or "standing apart" (from taking a position on certain issues or choosing the side of one group against another) comes closest to the orientation of the Mu'tazilite school. Influenced by Greek writings, the Mu'tazilites are said to have created "the speculative dogmatics of Islam" (*EI1* s.v. "*mu'tazila*" [H. S. Nyberg]).

Though not a unitary school as such, the Mu'tazilites asserted the supremacy of reason (*'aql*) over any belief that rests on tradition (*naql*).[32] Besides elevating the role of reason, the Mu'tazilite canonical system rests on five fundamental principles (*uṣûl*, singular *aṣl*). These are the following.

(I) *Aṣl al-tawḥîd* (the principle of absolute unity). This principle asserts the strict unity of God and His absolute indivisibility. *Al-tawḥîd* affirms the oneness of God in the strictest possible sense. It rejects any form of anthropomorphism —such as the notion of a God, who sees and hears, has eyes or ears as humans do. And it denies that any one or anything could share the attributes of God. Embedded in this principle is the Mu'tazilites' belief in the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran as we shall see below (1.2.4).

(II) *Aṣl al-'adl* (the principle of justice). God is just. God aims at what is best for His creation. He neither desires nor ordains evil. Man has a free will; and evil is the product of man's own choices and conduct.

(III) *Aṣl al-wa'd wa al-wa'îd*. This principle is primarily one of practical theology. It deals with promise (*wa'd*) and threat (*wa'îd*) which accrue to man as a result of his own behavior —which, in turn, is the product of the exercise of his free will.

(IV) *Aṣl al-manzila bayn al-manzilatayn* (the principle of the position between the two positions). This principle affirms the salvational status of the sinner (*fâsiq*) within the Community.

(V) *Aṣl al-amr bi-al-ma'rûf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*. This principle has to do with a general duty of all Muslims.[33] It makes it incumbent upon the Muslim to command (*amr*) and put into practice that which is good (*ma'rûf*) and to abstain from and prevent (*nahy*) the occurrence of

that which is evil and repulsive (*munkar*). Though this principle is not unique to the Mu'tazilites and is enshrined, word for word, in Koranic verses, this school's stress on it evoked much thought and controversy as to who has authority over whom, how far are Muslims permitted to go in "preventing" evil, what is and what is not evil and whether or not a revolt against legitimate authority is justified (Watt 1985, 52).

The Mu'tazilites have meticulously elaborated these five assertions and their derivations by reference to a great many Koranic verses and sayings of the Prophet (*ḥadîth*) within the framework of rational argument.[34] Most of the attention was focused on the issues of God's unity and justice (principles I and II) since these were considered the most central ones; no wonder, then, that the Mu'tazilites are sometimes referred to as *ahl al-'adl wa al-tawḥîd* (adherents to/proponents of justice and absolute unity).

1.2.4. The doctrine of the createdness of the Koran

The idea that the Koran is an object that was created by an act of God and the debate over this issue antedate al-Ma'mûn by perhaps more than a century (Madelung 1974).[35] Evidence reported by Watt (1950), Abusaq (1971) and Vajda (*EI2*, s.v. Ibn Dirham) among others, suggests that his advocating this doctrine had cost Dja'd b. Dirham his life on order of the tenth Umayyad caliph, Hishâm (r. 105/724-125/743). According to Amîn (1933-6, 3:162) and Sourdel (1962, 32), Hârûn al-Rashîd's threat to behead a man for teaching that the Koran was created drove this man into hiding for twenty years. The man in question was Bishr b. Ghiyâth al-Marîsî, a noted *mutakallim* (speculative theologian) who, after al-Rashîd died, acquired much influence at the court of al-Ma'mûn.

Proponents of the createdness of the Koran view, Mu'tazilites and others, argued that the Book, which is otherwise holy, cannot be conceived of as uncreated. According to the Mu'tazilites, a contrary view violates God's absolute unity (*aṣl al-tawḥîd*) and is thus a form of polytheism. This objection is straightforward: God is one and eternal, and acceptance of the notion that the Koran, too, is eternal would imply that the nature of God is no longer unique and one but, in this case, shared by an object, the Koran. Using this same argument, the Mu'tazilites objected to the Christian notion of the Trinity which, they believed, also violates the Unity of God. The Mu'tazilites accused as *mushrikûn* (polytheists) the non-believers in the createdness of the Koran doctrine, likening them to the Christians for claiming that "Jesus was not created because he is the word of God" (Madelung 1974, 517).

1.2.5. The miḥna

The word *miḥna* has several connotations.[36] Of these the one most fitting the context of our discussion is that which comes closest to what the term "inquisition" of the European Middle Ages came to mean – though certainly not in terms of the latter's range and excesses. Al-Ma'mûn's order of the *miḥna* in 218/833 had the express aim of securing acquiescence in the createdness of the Koran doctrine. However, it should be noted that in his order the caliph himself used the verb *imtaḥana* ("to interrogate" or "to examine"). It was Arab chroniclers who came after al-Ma'mûn who introduced the word *miḥna* to describe the caliph's order, and, as time went by, the term acquired emotional connotations conveying the impression that this episode was an ordeal which confronted the entire Islamic Community.

The *miḥna* became almost synonymous with the name of al-Ma'mûn not on account of his ordering it as such but because his was a thoroughgoing and systematic attempt to assure conformance to a religious doctrine of his choosing.[37] The *miḥna* lasted some sixteen years, ending, according to most reports, in 234/848-9. It was carried through by al-Mu'taṣim (r. 218/833-227/842) and al-Wâṯhiq (r. 227/842-232/847), al-Ma'mûn's two immediate successors to the caliphate and was terminated by al-Mutawakkil (r. 232/847-247/861), the man who succeeded his brother al-Wâṯhiq.

The information available to us on the *miḥna* is not altogether consistent with regard to who did what or when. We must, therefore, make do with general statements about such details as the number of people subjected to the *miḥna* from beginning to end, the forms which the pressures took or the roles of al-Mu'taṣim and al-Wâṯhiq. Our primary concern here is the *miḥna* which al-Ma'mûn put in motion, and, fortunately, the records on this are relatively rich in detail and specificity.

The number of people subjected to the *miḥna* ordered by al-Ma'mûn is not known with precision. Of these the names of only 44 men are known; a much greater number, whose names are not known, were also involved. The exact number of its victims under al-Mu'taṣim and al-Wâṯhiq is unknown.

As to the nature of the pressure used by al-Ma'mûn, some men were beaten, imprisoned, humiliated or lost their positions. A few were probably tortured but none was put to death – though some were threatened with the sword if they did not profess the doctrine. The impression one gathers from various sources leads one to believe that approximately the same range of pressures was applied during the regimes of al-Mu'taṣim and al-Wâṯhiq, though a few men may well have been executed as they persisted in refusing to comply. On the basis of all that we know, it would

be a gross exaggeration, however, to equate the *miḥna* with the inquisition of the European Middle Ages.

The motives of al-Ma'mûn's enterprise are, of course, the subject matter of this study. Let us review here what is known on the caliphs who followed al-Ma'mûn and who continued the *miḥna*.

Al-Mu'taṣim (r. 218/833-227/842) was a good soldier but did not have the intellectual power of his brother al-Ma'mûn. In all probability, he lacked his predecessor's appreciation of the subtle arguments on the createdness of the Koran or other theological or philosophical issues. Al-Mu'taṣim may have simply felt it his duty to honor his pledge to his brother, made to al-Ma'mûn after al-Mu'taṣim had heard the former's last will in which he was requested to continue the *miḥna*.

Al-Wâṯhiq (r. 227/842-232/847), al-Mu'taṣim's son, was of another caliber and turn of mind. Nicknamed al-Ma'mûn "*al-ṣaghîr*" (the young al-Ma'mûn) for his intellectual brilliance and breadth of knowledge, al-Wâṯhiq pursued the *miḥna* with much vigor and a brutality of which nobody had ever accused al-Ma'mûn. Provocatively and defiantly, al-Wâṯhiq ordered the inscription on entrances to the mosques "There is no deity but God, the Creator of the Koran" (Amîn 1933-6, 3:184). Again, the motives of al-Wâṯhiq elude explanation.

We know a little more about the motives which led the tenth 'Abbâsid caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 232/847-247/861) to close the chapter on the *miḥna* and release from prison those who had been there on its account. Apparently, this was not an act of mercy or expression of piety. Al-Mutawakkil's religious policy was marked by hostility to Christians and Jews[38] as well as to the Shi'ites.[39] By the time he ascended to power, opponents of the createdness of the Koran doctrine had become a strong force. To calm the public mood and gain popularity especially in Baghdad, al-Mutawakkil put an end to the *miḥna* by prohibiting any form of disputation about the Koran. Additionally, the caliph dismissed from service the chief judge (*qâḍî al-quḍât*), Aḥmad b. Abî Du'âd, who was a Mu'tazilite, and replaced him by a non-Mu'tazilite. Also Bišr b. al-Walîd al-Kindî, who at the time of al-Ma'mûn refused to consent to the doctrine and who continued his defiance later, was given a position (Watt 1973, 281). If all this was not enough to curry favor with the emerging group of the Sunnites, al-Mutawakkil demolished the tomb of al-Ḥusayn and threatened to imprison anyone who ventured a pilgrimage to his holy site at Karbalâ'.

So much for the overview and the generalities. Our attention will now shift to al-Ma'mûn's letters relating to his *miḥna* order.

The caliph wrote a series of five letters relating to the *miḥna*. The fullest text of these appears in al-Ṭabarî's (d. 310/923) section on the reign of

al-Ma'mûn which is part of his universal history. The first of the five letters was written in Rabî' I 218/March-April 833; the others, undated, followed in very rapid succession.

All five letters were addressed to Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm, the caliph's governor of Baghdad and its chief of police. The *miḥna*, which was ordered in the first of these letters, was designed to extract a public affirmation from those to be interrogated that the Koran was created. Many of those whom al-Ma'mûn wanted interrogated were mentioned by name. These included Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (164/780-241/855), founder of the most literalist school of law which was named after him.

Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm was further instructed to have the men who declared their assent to the doctrine interrogate those in their service. The interrogation of the men named by the caliph was carried out by Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm, occasionally in the presence of others. He was instructed to keep the caliph informed of the course of the deliberations. *Verbatim* reports were apparently made and sent to the caliph, but these have not survived.

The first of the caliph's letters has two important features. The first feature, which appears in the letter's preamble, affirms the caliph's right, indeed duty, to issue the *miḥna* order. The second feature consists of arguments, set forth in great detail, supporting and documenting the view that the Koran was created. The arguments were anchored in numerous Koranic verses and the rhetorical questions they evoked as well as the inferences which could be drawn from the verses. They all, said al-Ma'mûn, speak with one voice, and loudly: the Koran is incontrovertibly a creation of God, not an uncreated object. Whilst much of this first letter rests on reasoned arguments, some parts of it – and the totality of all subsequent letters as well – consisted of attacks on, and unveiled threats against, those who took issue with the caliph's views or refused to concede that the Koran was created. Responding to the last message from the caliph, Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm sent in chains those men al-Ma'mûn said he wanted to interrogate in person. Near al-Raqqa (northern Syria), on their way to Tarsus (now in southern Turkey), where the caliph was pausing in a campaign against the Byzantine empire, news came that he had died, whereupon the men were sent back to Baghdad.

In retrospect, the *miḥna* had a great impact on future developments in Islamic thought. Those who opposed the createdness of the Koran doctrine felt compelled to come up with cogent answers to the challenge posed by it. As a result of the *miḥna*, the Sunnite cumulative corpus of knowledge and formulations on the matter from that time onwards evolved into a crystallized view with foundations.[40]

After this presentation of the broader context, we move on to the person and reign of al-Ma'mûn himself.

'ABDALLÂH AL-MA'MÛN: A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND REIGN

This chapter presents a sketch of the life and reign of the seventh 'Abbâsid caliph al-Ma'mûn as background for the chapters to come.[1]

The little that is known about al-Ma'mûn's formative years is presented in the first of the three paragraphs which comprise this chapter. The second paragraph deals with the Civil War between the two brothers, al-Amîn and al-Ma'mûn. The main body of the chapter, the third paragraph, sets forth the salient events of al-Ma'mûn's reign.

2.1. The formative years

'Abdallâh, known under his caliphal name of al-Ma'mûn, was born on Rabî' I 15, 170/September 14, 786.[2] He was the eldest of the eleven sons al-Rashîd is said to have had. His mother was a concubine originally from Bâdhghîs (a province of Khurasan) named Marâdjil who died soon after al-Ma'mûn's birth. Zubayda, granddaughter of the second 'Abbâsid caliph al-Mansûr and favorite wife of al-Rashîd, took care of the upbringing of both her stepson al-Ma'mûn and her own son Muhammad al-Amîn who was born (in Shawwâl 170/April 787) approximately six months after al-Ma'mûn.

As was customary for the children of the 'Abbâsid rulers,[3] al-Ma'mûn received a very elaborate education in the most important fields of learning of the day. Al-Kisâ'î[4] was his tutor in the Arabic language whilst al-Yazîdî[5] taught him *adab* ("the humanities"), music and poetry. With regard to theological sciences, al-Ma'mûn was trained in *hadîth* and he became a traditionist himself. He was taught *fiqh* (Islamic law) by al-Hasan b. Ziyâd al-Lu'lu'î[6] and al-Ma'mûn became an expert in Hanafite jurisprudence. Throughout his life, al-Ma'mûn loved learning and intellectual pursuits, and it appears that he had outstanding mental abilities which set him far above al-Amîn.

When al-Ma'mûn was eighteen years old, he married his cousin Umm 'Îsâ, daughter of al-Hâdî, the fourth 'Abbâsid caliph whose brief rule had occurred in 169/785.[7] Not unlike his father, al-Ma'mûn had numerous

concubines who gave birth to a number of his children. His most famous son was al-'Abbâs who became a very efficient military leader.

The first concrete encounter al-Ma'mûn had with politics was in 183/799 when he was declared by al-Rashîd[8] as second heir after his younger brother al-Amîn who was an 'Abbâsid on both sides of his family and who had already been designated in 175/792 as successor. Third in line was another son of al-Rashîd, al-Qâsim who was given the name of al-Mu'taman.

This arrangement for the succession was solemnly proclaimed and signed by the parties concerned and witnessed in Mecca during the pilgrimage of 186/802. This agreement is known to us as the "Meccan Accord".[9] The stipulations of the Meccan Accord were as follows. Al-Amîn was to remain caliph with Baghdad as the capital; Khurasan was entrusted to al-Ma'mûn to be governed autonomously by him, while the warfront with the Byzantine empire[10] was given to al-Mu'taman. The troops of both al-Amîn and al-Ma'mûn were entitled to enter either of the territories in pursuit of enemies without implying infringement or revocation of the Accord.

Even before the Meccan Accord, Dja'far b. Yahyâ al-Barmakî[11] had been appointed advisor to al-Ma'mûn. This lasted until the downfall of the Barmakid family in Safar 187/January 803 just after al-Rashîd returned from the pilgrimage which had witnessed the arrangements for his succession. From then onwards al-Ma'mûn's close advisor was al-Fadl b. Sahl about whom more will be said later.

2.2. The Civil War

On 2 Djumâdâ II 193/24 March 809 al-Rashîd died at Tûs[12] on his way to subdue a rebel in Khurasan. Al-Rashîd had been accompanied by, amongst others, his chamberlain/vizier al-Fadl b. al-Rabî',[13] al-Fadl b. Sahl and al-Ma'mûn who had preceded his father to the Khurasanian city of Marw with an advance contingent. Upon the death of al-Rashîd, al-Amîn became caliph while al-Ma'mûn assumed responsibility for Khurasan as stipulated in the Meccan Accord. Al-Amîn appears to have had other designs, however. He started off by ordering the army and treasury to be brought back to Baghdad. Al-Fadl b. al-Rabî' took the army with him and returned to Baghdad as the new caliph had ordered. Though his freedom for maneuvering was quite restricted as a result of his being deprived of the needed resources, al-Ma'mûn was nevertheless able to pacify the region. He did so by securing the support of some local Khurasanis; the Khurasanian troops were to remain the backbone of al-Ma'mûn's

power base and loyal following throughout the greater part of his caliphal reign.

This step by al-Amîn was only the first of a number of measures he took and of which some were in direct violation of the Meccan Accord. The caliph's addition of the name of his young son, Mûsâ, to the list of heirs to the caliphate (the others being first al-Ma'mûn and secondly al-Mu'taman) in 194/810 was another in the series of events which culminated in the Civil War.[14] Al-Amîn was quick to issue an order to al-Ma'mûn, which he refused, to return to Baghdad to become the caliph's adviser. Al-Amîn responded by trying to tighten his financial control over the eastern provinces by first demanding that the revenues be sent to him directly, then by appointing his own financial agents – a deed that went clearly against the spirit if not the letter of the Meccan Accord. Al-Ma'mûn reacted to this by having al-Amîn's name removed from the coinage and the *ṭirâz*[15] of Khurasan.

A complete break between the two brothers came when al-Amîn named two of his own sons, Mûsâ and 'Abdallâh, as heirs replacing al-Ma'mûn as well as al-Mu'taman, thereby putting a final end to the Meccan Accord which all involved had sworn to honor. Deprived of his official status, al-Ma'mûn initiated what he called "the second 'Abbâsid *da'wa*" (call) in order to regain his rights, echoing his ancestors' *da'wa* against the Umayyads of six decades earlier. A civil war, traditionally known as the fourth major one in Islam, lay on the horizon.[16]

Preparations for real acts of war commenced in Djumâdâ II 195/March 811 when 'Alî b. 'Îsâ b. Mâhân, chief of the *abnâ'*[17] – and at one time governor of Khurasan under al-Rashîd – was appointed by al-Amîn as governor of Djibâl[18] with the mission of restoring caliphal authority in Khurasan. Al-Ma'mûn's opposing forces were led by Hartha-ma b. A'yan and Ṭâhir b. al-Ḥusayn.

The war did not last long but it was bitter. After the decisive battle at Rayy, in Sha'bân 195/May 811, al-Amîn's troops were defeated, their commander ('Alî b. 'Îsâ b. Mâhân) killed and al-Ma'mûn was proclaimed caliph. In the night of 24-5 Muharram 198/24-5 September 813 Ṭâhir b. al-Ḥusayn is said to have ordered the execution of al-Amîn at Baghdad.

2.3. Al-Ma'mûn's reign

The reign of al-Ma'mûn was to last 21 years, nine months and 13 days. On Ṣafar 15, 204/August 11, 819 – the caliph was almost 34 years old at the time – he entered the capital Baghdad after having decided to leave Marw. This date is important since after the move a change in the kind of difficulties al-Ma'mûn had to face occurred as we shall presently see.

Two main features of al-Ma'mûn's reign in the nine years preceding the move to Baghdad can be singled out: A series of revolts in the heart of the empire (that is, the province of Iraq and the capital Baghdad) and the Sahlid (the brothers al-Fadl and al-Ḥasan b. Sahl) presence in the government.

The Civil War created a vacuum in the heart of the empire. Consequently, a number of groups, including Shi'ite ones, thought the time ripe for an attempt to gain leadership over the Community. This was not completely surprising since the policies of the previous 'Abbâsid caliphs towards the Shi'ites had not followed any clear or predictable line.[19] The most prominent Shi'ite uprising during al-Ma'mûn's caliphate was that of Abû al-Sarâyâ.[20] Abû al-Sarâyâ is said to have been a renegade lieutenant in the army of Harthama b. A'yan, one of the two major commanders who supported al-Ma'mûn.[21] Abû al-Sarâyâ first supported the claims of Muḥammad b. Ibrâhîm b. Ṭabâṭabâ, a descendant of al-Ḥasan b. 'Alî (b. Abî Ṭâlib). On 10 Djumâdâ II 199/26 January 815 this Ḥasanid (Ibn Ṭabâṭabâ) was heralded at al-Kûfa as *al-riḍâ min âl Muḥammad*,[22] a designation tantamount to proclaiming him as caliph. One month after this proclamation, Ibn Ṭabâṭabâ died either due to wounds he received during a battle with the caliphal forces or because he was poisoned by Abû al-Sarâyâ.

Immediately after Ibn Ṭabâṭabâ's death, Abû al-Sarâyâ had a substitute proclaimed, this time a Ḥusaynid by the name of Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Zayd, a son of the man who later was to become known as the seventh *imâm* of the Twelver Shi'ites, Mûsâ al-Kâẓim. The foremost objective of the rebels under Abû al-Sarâyâ was the spreading of their budding Shi'ite movement to the whole of Iraq. At al-Baṣra, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Zayd attacked the properties of the 'Abbâsids and the same was done in al-Kûfa.[23] The rebels then proceeded to Baghdad. As these men approached the capital, the military power of al-Ḥasan b. Sahl (who led the caliphal army) was so weak that he was forced to ask for the help of a personal antagonist, Harthama b. A'yan. Harthama b. A'yan declined but was finally persuaded to join the fight; he was able to put an end to the revolt, and its leader, Abû al-Sarâyâ, was decapitated in Rabî' I 200/October 815. The two important cities of al-Kûfa and al-Baṣra were recaptured and Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Zayd was arrested and sent to al-Ma'mûn at Marw.

A Shi'ite threat was not over yet. At approximately the same time that Abû al-Sarâyâ was executed, an envoy of his was successful in proclaiming as *imâm* in Mecca (in Rabî' I 200/November 815) Muḥammad al-Dîbâdja, a descendant of the man who would become known as the sixth *imâm* of the Twelver Shi'ites, Dja'far al-Ṣâdiq. One of the military leaders

of that faction of the *abnâ'* which had supported al-Ma'mûn during the Civil War, Ḥamdawayh (a son of 'Alî b. 'Îsâ b. Mâhân) was put in charge of dealing with this revolt. He succeeded in recapturing Mecca, and Muḥammad al-Dîbâdja eventually went into exile in the province of Djurdjân.[24]

In Ṣafar 200/September 815, Ibrâhîm, another son of Mûsâ al-Kâẓim, initiated yet a new revolt which was so bloody that he earned himself the nickname "*al-Djazzâr*" (the butcher). This revolt, too, was suppressed by Ḥamdawayh who, in the same year, had freed Mecca from the Shi'ite rebels.[25] In the course of this revolt, Ibrâhîm further induced a descendant of the elder brother of 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib ('Aqîl b. Abî Ṭâlib) to lead a military force in order to gain command of conducting the pilgrimage of the year 200/816. The "'Aqîlî" rebels were whipped and sent back to the Yemen where they had come from, after they and their leader had been captured by men in service of al-Ma'mûn's brother, Abû Isḥâq (al-Mu'taṣim).

The turbulence in the empire was not limited to the Shi'ites, the 'Alids or the Ṭâlibids. In Baghdad itself fighting broke out in the year 200/816-7 between forces of the Ḥarbiyya district of the city[26] and al-Ma'mûn's troops which were led by al-Ḥasan b. Sahl. The cause of this uprising seems to have been the postponement of paying the troops by al-Ḥasan b. Sahl – possibly due to the central government's preoccupation at the time with suppressing a multitude of revolts and the consequent fall in fiscal remittances. The protest of the Ḥarbiyya troops spread, leading to civil strife throughout the whole city of Baghdad. As a consequence, some power brokers in the city appointed a son of the caliph al-Hâdî, Isḥâq b. Mûsâ, as a representative for al-Ma'mûn to replace the appointees of al-Ḥasan b. Sahl. Soon thereafter (in 201/816), this opposition movement came under the leadership of Muḥammad b. Abî Khâlid, the son of a very prominent *abnâ'* commander (who had his power base in the Ḥarbiyya quarter). Muḥammad b. Abî Khâlid was supported by, amongst others, al-Manṣûr b. al-Mahdî (that is, a son of the caliph al-Mahdî) and al-Faḍl b. al-Rabî', the man who previously had been a vizier under al-Amîn. Increasingly, the protest took the form of an attack focused on the Sahlid presence in al-Ma'mûn's administration.

The Sahlid influence at the caliphal court was the second feature which characterized al-Ma'mûn's reign prior to his move to Baghdad. Inhabitants of Baghdad together with a number of 'Abbâsids were unwilling to accept the status the Sahlids had acquired for themselves in a regime whose head was by no means wholeheartedly accepted by them anyway. Harthama b. A'yan, another prominent leader of the *abnâ'*, deemed the position of the Sahlids too perilous to the caliph. So much so that he de-

cided not to abide by al-Ma'mûn's order to accept the governorship of Syria and the Ḥidjâz, opting instead to lead a large contingent of his troops to Marw to inform al-Ma'mûn personally of the situation in Iraq and of the prevailing antipathy to the Sahlids. Al-Faḍl b. Sahl's influence on the caliph, however, seemed so strong that Harthama b. A'yan, a long-time and loyal supporter of al-Ma'mûn and his family, was thrown into prison and subsequently murdered (probably on the orders of al-Faḍl b. Sahl) in Dhû al-Ḳa'da 200/June 816.

The resentment of the 'Abbâsid family to the rulership of al-Ḥasan b. Sahl in Iraq and the influence of his brother al-Faḍl on al-Ma'mûn at court gradually reached a boiling point. On 25 Djumâdâ II 201/18 January 817 al-Ma'mûn's paternal uncle, al-Manṣûr b. al-Mahdî, grudgingly gave in to the pressures by the 'Abbâsids to become the "representative" of al-Ma'mûn in Baghdad – without the caliph's orders.[27] Civil strife in Baghdad did not abate, however, and chaos was just around the corner. Especially among the lower classes of Baghdad,[28] the resentment and deprivation led not only to massive support for the rebellious 'Abbâsids but also for a man called Sahl b. Salâma al-Anṣârî who preached in the city's quarter of the Ḥarbiyya the popular Islamic slogan of strict adherence to the Koran and the ways of the Prophet. Subsequently – illustrating the chaotic situation in the city – Sahl b. Salâma became an opponent of the rebellious 'Abbâsids.

Whatever measures al-Ma'mûn had taken, if any at all, in order to mend his relations with the mutinous 'Abbâsids and Baghdadis and to allay concerns over the influence of the Sahlids, his next step only added oil to the fire instead of putting it out. On 2 Ramaḍân 201/24 March 817 al-Ma'mûn designated 'Alî b. Mûsâ al-Kâẓim (known later as the eighth *imâm* of the Twelver Shi'ites) as his heir to the caliphate and he gave him the title of *al-riḍâ min âl Muḥammad* – hence his popularly known name as 'Alî al-Riḍâ. The timing of this action is very curious for it seems like a slap in the face of the 'Abbâsids. Al-Ma'mûn did not stop with this move. The caliph saw also fit to replace the traditional 'Abbâsid color of black by the color green; one of the caliph's daughters was married to 'Alî al-Riḍâ, another one to 'Alî al-Riḍâ's son, Muḥammad.

In light of these events, a number of prominent 'Abbâsids together with some *abnâ'* leaders declared open rebellion against the caliph. On 28 Dhû al-Ḥidjdja 201/17 July 817 Ibrâhîm b. al-Mahdî, another paternal uncle of al-Ma'mûn, was proclaimed caliph[29] and Isḥâq b. Mûsâ al-Hâdî[30] was designated as his heir.[31]

Fighting broke out between al-Ḥasan b. Sahl and the forces of Ibrâhîm b. al-Mahdî, the anti-caliph. In Djumâdâ I 202/November 817 al-'Abbâs, the governor of al-Kûfa, who was the brother of al-Ma'mûn's designated

heir, 'Alî al-Riḍâ, was expelled from that city by Ibrâhîm b. al-Mahdî. With war in Iraq between the forces of al-Ḥasan b. Sahl and Ibrâhîm b. al-Mahdî still dragging on, 'Alî al-Riḍâ reportedly told al-Ma'mûn of what was happening in that province; the caliph had been kept in the dark on the gravity of the situation by his vizier al-Faḍl b. Sahl. It was then, too, that al-Ma'mûn decided to leave Marw for Baghdad; he headed for the capital on 10 Radjab 202/22 January 818.

Two major events, both involving sudden deaths, occurred during the rather long stretch of sixteen months which it took al-Ma'mûn to arrive in Baghdad. On 2 Sha'bân 202/13 February 818 al-Faḍl b. Sahl was murdered at Sarakhs while taking a bath. It is unknown who was behind this assassination, but some reports have it that al-Ma'mûn was. At any rate, soon after al-Faḍl b. Sahl's death, al-Ma'mûn wrote to al-Ḥasan b. Sahl expressing his sadness over the murder of his brother. That al-Ma'mûn needed the good will of al-Ḥasan b. Sahl seems clear enough: he was then the commander-in-chief of the caliphal forces in the West whose support was essential to unseat the anti-caliph and put an end to the uprising of his own family. Despite the caliph's need for al-Ḥasan b. Sahl, al-Faḍl b. Sahl's death marked the end of Sahlid preeminence in the caliphal administration.[32]

Approximately seven months later, on 29 Ṣafar 203/5 September 818, 'Alî al-Riḍâ died; here, too, the cause of death remains uncertain. At any rate, the 'Alid heir to the caliphate was no more and 'Alî al-Riḍâ's disappearance from the political stage was at that moment a felicitous event in that it facilitated a possible reconciliation with the rebellious 'Abbâsids and *abnâ'* of Baghdad.

As al-Ma'mûn entered the capital (on Ṣafar 11, 204/August 7, 819), the support of the anti-caliph Ibrâhîm b. al-Mahdî melted away. About the only resistance he encountered was the disapproval by the 'Abbâsids and the bulk of the military of replacing the color black by green – an objection voiced, amongst others, by the military commander Ṭâhir b. al-Ḥusayn leading al-Ma'mûn to revert to the traditional 'Abbâsid color of black.

There are two notable clusters of events during the second part of al-Ma'mûn's reign – the period beginning with his entry in Baghdad till his death. The first cluster consists of three major uprisings outside the heart of the empire – one in Syria, another in Egypt and the third in the East. The second cluster of events has to do with religious matters, notably the issuance of the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran and the *miḥna*.

Before we move on to an account of these events, it is important to note that what the Sahlids had been to al-Ma'mûn in the period prior to the move to Baghdad, the Ṭâhirids were in the second part of his reign.

Gradually the Ṭâhirids – due to their excellence as military leaders – acquired increasing influence in the caliphate. Toward the end of 205/820, Ṭâhir b. al-Ḥusayn was made governor of Khurasan. In the following years the Ṭâhirids established themselves as an almost autonomous dynasty in this key province.[33] When Ṭâhir b. al-Ḥusayn died in Djumâdâ II, 207/October-November 822 he was succeeded by his son Ṭalḥa b. Ṭâhir who died in 213/828-9 or in 214/829. The very successful 'Abdallâh b. Ṭâhir, another son of Ṭâhir b. al-Ḥusayn, and greatly admired by al-Ma'mûn, was transferred to Khurasan after Ṭalḥa's death. Before leaving, 'Abdallâh appointed his cousin Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm to replace him as head of the *shurṭa* (security forces) of Baghdad.[34] The Ṭâhirids played a pivotal role in suppressing the revolts of this period – including that of Naṣr b. Shabath – and, in so doing, helped to buttress the authority of al-Ma'mûn's administration.

For many years, Naṣr b. Shabath had been agitating in Syria, posing a threat to the central government. Making use of the chaos brought about by the Civil War, Naṣr b. Shabath seized the opportunity to continuously raid northern Syria. Ṭâhir b. al-Ḥusayn was sent to al-Raqqa to quell the uprising at the beginning of al-Ma'mûn's reign (in 199/813), but he achieved very little. It was only after al-Ma'mûn had come to Baghdad that Ṭâhir b. al-Ḥusayn took forceful action against this uprising. After the combat had dragged on for almost a decade, Ṭâhir b. al-Ḥusayn's son, 'Abdallâh, was able to force Naṣr b. Shabath to accept a truce (in 209/824-5).

Immediately after this victory, 'Abdallâh b. Ṭâhir was ordered by al-Ma'mûn to put an end to the mutiny of 'Ubaydallâh b. al-Sarî b. al-Ḥakam in Egypt. 'Ubaydallâh had been head of the security forces (*ṣâḥib al-shurṭa*) in Egypt since 205/820-1 and became governor of that same province in Sha'bân 206/January 822. More than once he refused al-Ma'mûn's attempts to have him replaced and then openly rebelled. In the end, al-Ma'mûn personally went to Egypt to pacify the province.

The third major rebellion was that of Bâbak in the eastern part of the empire.[35] Despite the fact that al-Ma'mûn had sent a number of expeditions against this group, the revolt was not crushed until many years later – during the caliphate of al-Mu'taṣim. In 204/819-20 Yaḥyâ b. Mu'âdh[36] was defeated by Bâbak and in 213/828 Muḥammad b. Ḥumayd b. al-Ṭûsî[37] died at the hands of this rebellious movement.

Now it is time to leave these insurrections to address the second set of important events which took place during the fourteen years following al-Ma'mûn's entry of his capital. In total the caliph spoke four times publicly about issues of religio-political significance. Taking these in the order of their occurrence, the first took place around 211/826 when the caliph had

a herald proclaim that there was to be no protection for anyone who spoke favorably of the Umayyad caliph Mu'âwiya or granted him a superior status over any of the other Companions of the Prophet. Then in Rabî' I 212/June 827, the caliph publicly declared the preeminence of 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib (*tafḍîl 'Alî*) saying that 'Alî was the best of mankind after the Prophet; at the very same time, indeed in the same breath as most chroniclers report it, al-Ma'mûn declared that the Koran was created by God, and was not an uncreated object. The fourth and last rescript was enunciated by the caliph six years later – four months before his sudden death. As has been described in 1.2.5., al-Ma'mûn ordered a number of men to be interrogated as to whether or not they assented to the view that the Koran was created.

Before drawing the curtain over the life and administration of al-Ma'mûn, a few words need to be said about the caliph as a military leader. Toward the end of his reign, al-Ma'mûn undertook a reorganization of his army on a grand scale.[38] For reasons that remain obscure, the caliph saw fit in 213/828, five years before his death, to split the army into three units, each with its own leader in charge of military matters in the region of the empire al-Ma'mûn assigned to him. The Ṭâhirid Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm, head of police and governor of Baghdad, was put in charge of Iraq, Djibâl and Fârs;[39] al-'Abbâs, son of al-Ma'mûn, was designated to head the region which encompassed the frontier with the Byzantine empire (the border area between modern Turkey and Syria), the Djazîra and the rest of northern Syria; and, Abû Isḥâq (the later al-Mu'taṣim), brother of the caliph, was put in charge of Egypt.

Despite this organizational division the caliph was never averse to leading military campaigns personally or taking matters into his own hands when he felt the need had arisen. The military campaign he led into Egypt in Muḥarram 217/February 832 is one example.[40] This campaign, it should be added, came at the heel of two others which al-Ma'mûn had personally led into the Byzantine empire from the region under the charge of al-'Abbâs.[41]

No sooner had al-Ma'mûn returned from Egypt than he found himself forced to move against the Byzantine empire for the third (and last) time within the span of two or three years. Indeed, the campaigns against the Byzantine empire characterize the last years of this 'Abbâsid caliph's reign and it was during the last one that al-Ma'mûn passed away near Tarsus in Radjab 218/August 833 reportedly due to eating spoiled dates. On his deathbed, al-Ma'mûn appointed his brother, Abû Isḥâq, as his successor thereby passing over his sons, including the otherwise apparently trusted and competent son al-'Abbâs.[42]

After this brief survey of the highlights of al-Ma'mûn's life and reign, we proceed now to the formulation of the research question and a description of how the answer to it was sought.

EXPLAINING WHY AL-MA'MÛN SPOKE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE CREATEDNESS OF THE KORAN AND ORDERED THE *MIḤNA*

This chapter consists of two paragraphs. The first gives the reader a quick and general impression of the diverse paths which have been charted and followed by modern scholars for explaining al-Ma'mûn's public declaration of the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran and his introduction of the *miḥna*. Drawing on this secondary literature, it subsequently specifies three such paths that are sufficiently substantive and promising to use as frameworks for an in-depth exploration. Each of these will be described separately. Paragraph two delineates some points of departure which guided my own scrutiny of the primary sources. It also presents the primary sources I used, explaining how I used them and the rationale for their selection.

3.1. A survey of current explanations of the declaration and the miḥna

Over the years, numerous explanations of al-Ma'mûn's declaration that the Koran was created and his *miḥna* decree have been proposed. One generalization that can safely be made about these explanations is that none of them enjoys such a degree of consensus as to fully satisfy more than their proponents. The scope of current explanations is very wide indeed. They do, however, lend themselves to categorization into two broad groups: fragmentary explanations and integrative ones.

The fragmentary explanations are essentially descriptions of what al-Ma'mûn is thought to have been like or consist simply of tagging labels on his conduct. Muir (1891, 506), for example, proposes that al-Ma'mûn was a "cruel" man; and, likewise, Patton (1897, 6-7) sees the caliph as a "spiritual and physical tyrant" and reads into his actions "religious intolerance". Huddâra (1985, 260), much impressed by the caliph's "deep religiosity" takes the view that it was "for the sake of faith and God" that al-Ma'mûn spoke of the doctrine and ordered the *miḥna*. Zaydân (1902-6) and Hitti (1968) nuancing the views of Muir and Weil (1848) before him, take the position that al-Ma'mûn was a "free thinker" who, however, carried this notion to the extreme of denying its exercise to anyone who

dared to disagree with him. In the same drift, Rifâ'î (1927, 1:398) concludes that the two events in question reflect a "tragic policy" of a "free thinker" who was also "eccentric".

Of course, it is reasonable to presume that whatever salient personality traits the caliph may have had did play a role in shaping his decisions. However, labels are poor explanations at best. Fragmentary explanations are also weak in that they tend to assume that the caliph was acting as though the world around him was inert and that he was immune to its forces.

The explanations which fall into the integrative group are more credible. They also have greater explanatory power in that they do greater justice to the totality of the complex network of circumstances, events and persons surrounding the declaration of the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran and the introduction of the *miḥna*.

To the group of scholars whose explanations we call integrative belong Amîn (1933-6), Cahen (1968), Crone and Hinds (1986), Gabrieli (1929), Hinds (*EI2*, s.v. "*miḥna*"), Lapidus (1975), Nagel (1975), Sourdel (1962), 'Umar (1977) and Watt (1950, 1963, 1973). Coming as these scholars do from diverse disciplines, they display the expected difference in content and accents. Quite often, a particular issue is used by one scholar as an axle to the interpretation while another uses it merely as a hub in the wheel. They differ, too, in the degree to which they are willing to "enter the mind" of the caliph to tell us how he might have thought and felt. An overview of the integrative explanatory trends found in the secondary literature will be presented immediately, and subparagraphs 3.1.1.1 through 3.1.1.3 will deal with their particulars.

Most scholars see the caliph as a *homo politicus*. His tactics are variously described as mild and benevolent (Gabrieli 1929) or Machiavellian (al-Dûrî 1945). Lapidus (1975) sees al-Ma'mûn as a calculating man while others[1] see him more as one fumbling to steady the ship of state in what seems like one desperate maneuver after another. Nagel (1975) and Crone and Hinds (1986) see al-Ma'mûn's perception of caliphal authority and his determination to stamp out any opposition to its exercise as the key element in the proclamation of the createdness of the Koran and the issuance of the *miḥna* decree.

These views are shared by Gabrieli (1929), Sourdel (1962) and 'Umar (1977). Especially for Sourdel and 'Umar the caliph's actions betray a deliberate attempt on his part to forge for himself and the caliphate a power base and authority which his 'Abbâsid predecessors had never been able to secure fully. An element of signal importance in this past failure were the incessant and widely-spread upheavals among the resentful Shi'ites who helped the 'Abbâsids wrest the caliphate from the Umayyads only to

be thanked by repeated suppressions. Zaydân (1902-6) and Gabrieli (1929) believe that al-Ma'mûn was intent on repaying the 'Alids and their partisans the overdue debt owed to them by especially al-Saffâḥ and al-Manṣûr.

In explaining the *miḥna* and appreciating the multi-dimensionality of the circumstances which the caliph was confronting, scholars have also had much to say about the development of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) at the time (Crone and Hinds 1986), the place of the *'ulamâ'* in the scheme of things (Hodgson 1974 and Lapidus 1975) and the role of the Mu'tazilites who saw a great deal eye to eye with the caliph (Amîn 1933-6 and Laoust 1965). Within the broad spectrum of the material just sketched, three sets of substantive and well-supported views offer promise as satisfactory explanatory frameworks.

3.1.1. Three focuses

Three recurring explanatory themes are found in the literature. The themes revolve around (1) al-Ma'mûn's affinities with the Mu'tazilites; (2) his affinities with Shi'ism (and the 'Alids); and (3) his conception of the caliphate and the domain of its authority.

These three themes will be formulated as general propositions. Each of the three will be broken into a pair of sub-propositions addressing respectively the issue of the createdness of the Koran and the *miḥna*.

It bears pointing out that though the name of a particular author may be mentioned only in the context of material pertaining to one particular proposition, this should not imply that the scholar in question rejects the rest. It is rare indeed to find a scholar who endorses one proposition only.

3.1.1.1. Proposition I: Mu'tazilism

This proposition states that

> Al-Ma'mûn's affinities with the Mu'tazilites or their views were the motives for:
> → his declaration of the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran and,
> → his introduction of the *miḥna*.

Scholars who take this position stress that certain important views held by the caliph belonged to mainstream Mu'tazilite thought, and that his bond with some notable Mu'tazilites was quite strong and intimate. Inasmuch as the consensus on these points is broad and the range of variation in opinion is quite narrow, it is unnecessary to draw on more than a couple of works, notably those of Amîn (1933-6) and Watt (1973), for bringing together some lines of evidence in support of Proposition I.

The first ground common to the Mu'tazilites and al-Ma'mûn mentioned in the literature is the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran. Al-Ma'mûn had of course declared it – though only when he ordered the *miḥna* – as official state policy and the doctrine happened to be a Mu'tazilite one – even if its alleged originator, al-Djaʿd b. Dirham, may or may not be properly called a Mu'tazilite. It is also well-established that al-Ma'mûn had given patronage to many men who were noted for their interest in "rational theology" (*kalâm*) – of whom the Mu'tazilites were the most prominent group at the time (Watt 1973, 145).

The names of three influential Mu'tazilite thinkers are repeatedly mentioned by scholars as having had a particular impact on the caliph: Abû Hudhayl al-'Allâf, Thumâma b. Ashras and Aḥmad b. Abî Du'âd.

Abû al-Hudhayl al-'Allâf[2] is said to have functioned as teacher (*ustâdh*) to al-Ma'mûn, though, perhaps more accurately, as a counselor and guide to him in theological debates and disputations (Amîn 1933-6, 3:98). Another line connecting the caliph with the *shaykh al-mu'tazila* (sheikh of the Mu'tazilites), as Abû al-Hudhayl was called (Marwah 1978, 1:679), was an indirect one: he contributed to the intellectual development of two other distinguished Mu'tazilite thinkers, al-Naẓẓâm and al-Djâḥiẓ,[3] who, though not part of al-Ma'mûn's entourage, were greatly admired by the caliph and the latter was given his patronage.

On two occasions, separated by several years, al-Ma'mûn invited Thumâma b. Ashras[4] to become his vizier but he declined (Sourdel 1959-60, 220-1 and 238). Nonetheless, he continued to enjoy the caliph's favor and al-Ma'mûn always held him in higher esteem than he did his viziers. His status in the eyes of al-Ma'mûn can also be gauged by the fact that he was one of the two Mu'tazilite leaders who witnessed the 201/817 document which al-Ma'mûn wrote naming 'Alî al-Ridâ as his heir.[5]

The other (Baghdadi) Mu'tazilite who had intimate ties with al-Ma'mûn was Aḥmad b. Abî Du'âd,[6] the "primarily political figure ... who was greatly honoured at the court of al-Ma'mûn" (Watt 1973, 223). Patton (1897) sees Ibn Abî Du'âd as the greatest dynamo behind the *miḥna*. Amîn (1933-6, 3:159) agrees with this evaluation; he considers Ibn Abî Du'âd as "the greatest impetus behind the initiation of the *miḥna*". It is pointed out that the eminent status accorded to him by al-Ma'mûn is attested to by the fact that, in his last will and testament, the caliph explicitly asked al-Mu'taṣim to take to heart Ibn Abî Du'âd's counsel – a recommendation al-Mu'taṣim implemented, as did al-Wâthiq after him.

In closing, the question is raised if the caliph would adopt a religious doctrine and introduce a *miḥna* to implement it, solely on grounds of intellectual kinship with the Mu'tazilites or Mu'tazilism?

3.1.1.2. Proposition II: Shi'ism

> Al-Ma'mûn's affinities with Shi'ism or the 'Alids were the motive for:
> → his declaration of the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran, and
> → his introduction of the *miḥna*.

Four major lines of evidence are found in the literature which connect al-Ma'mûn with Shi'ism and the 'Alids: (1) the belief that the Koran was created; (2) concrete indications of the caliph's Shi'ite leanings, the most important of these being his adoption of the title of *imâm*; (3) special veneration for 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib; and (4) the appointment of 'Alî b. Mûsâ al-Riḍâ as heir.

(1) According to the proponents of this proposition, the idea that the Koran was created by God is accepted by the mainstream Shi'ites in general (Amîn 1933-6, 3:267; Watt 1950) and by the Zaydites, the Shi'ite subsect, in particular ('Ârif 1987, 182-6); of the Shi'ites, especially the subsect of the Zaydites is associated with al-Ma'mûn, particularly by Sourdel (1962) and Nagel (1975).

(2) The Shi'ites preferred the use of the term "*imâm*" to the one more familiar to us, caliph. As may be recalled from Chapter One, the Shi'ites distinguished between "true" and "false" caliphs, of whom only those falling within the former group were worthy of the venerable appellation of *imâm*. Al-Ma'mûn referred to himself as *imâm* when al-Amîn was trying to remove him as his successor and al-Ma'mûn is said to have been the first of the caliphs to use "*imâm*" as his official title (Sourdel 1962, 37; Watt 1973, 177 and 'Umar 1977, 222). Al-Ma'mûn, further, referred to himself as *imâm* in about 198/813-4 when he addressed his army officers (Nagel 1975) and, again, he used it as self-description in the last year of his life – in the context of the first letter on the *miḥna*; here, indeed, al-Ma'mûn ascribed to himself qualities which the Shi'ites reserve to the *imâm* (Sourdel 1962; Watt 1973 and Nagel 1975).

(3) The Shi'ites generally took the position that 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib was the "most excellent" (*al-afḍal*) of men after the Prophet. Most of the Shi'ites had a distaste for Mu'âwiya whom they considered to have usurped the caliphate from 'Alî and his progeny. The Zaydites shared this same general opinion without, however, going as far as other fellow-Shi'ite groups in denouncing as illegitimate the caliphates of the three men who preceded 'Alî. Some scholars[7] agree that al-Ma'mûn took the same position the Zaydites did: the general Zaydite position is anchored in the fact that, first, 'Alî himself had accepted the caliphates of his predecessors and, secondly, that it is legitimate to have someone as *imâm* so long as he

is "excellent" (*mafḍûl*) even when someone of greater excellence (*afḍal*) than he is available.[8]

(4) The story of the designation of 'Alî b. Mûsâ al-Riḍâ by the caliph as his heir is discussed by almost everyone who has written on al-Ma'mûn. It is irrelevant to the issue at hand whether the caliph made his choice on grounds of principle (doing the justice he thought was due to the 'Alids [Gabrieli 1929]), or for "political motives" – striking a compromise between conflicting factional interests, punishing his 'Abbâsid family for its hostility to him, appeasing the constant 'Alid revolts or for any combination of these.[9] The point being made here is that scholars consider the designation of 'Alî by al-Ma'mûn as a manifestation of his affinities with, if not partiality to, the 'Alids.

Sourdel (1962) and Nagel (1975) are of the opinion that al-Ma'mûn's adoption of "personal merit" as a prime criterion for the leader of the Islamic Community is very significant in that it links the caliph to especially the Zaydites. Additional support for this view may be adduced from the fact that, as a further bow to this criterion and the "personal merit" of 'Alî, his designee as heir, the caliph gave him the title of the "pleasing-one within the family of [the Prophet] Muḥammad" (*al-riḍâ min âl Muḥammad*) which is considered by the Zaydites as the most appropriate designation for the *imâm* ('Ârif 1987, 327).

It is mainly on the basis of such indications as we have just presented that scholars see an unmistakable affinity between al-Ma'mûn, the Shi'ites (particularly the Zaydites) and the 'Alids. Here, too, it is appropriate to close the discussion by raising the same question asked when the caliph's Mu'tazilite affinities were canvassed: do these affinities between al-Ma'mûn, the Shi'ites and the 'Alids sufficiently explain his declaration of the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran and/or the introduction of the *miḥna*?

3.1.1.3. Proposition III: Al-Ma'mûn's vision of the caliphate

> Al-Ma'mûn's vision of the caliphal institution and of the authority of the caliph was the motive which prompted him to:
> → declare the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran, and
> → introduce the *miḥna*.

This proposition finds support in the works of Sourdel (1962), Nagel (1975) and Watt (1973), but more explicitly in those of Lapidus (1975), Hinds (*EI2*, s.v. "*miḥna*") and Crone and Hinds (1986). Generally speaking, the status of the 'Abbâsid empire at al-Ma'mûn's time serves as point of departure for the logic of the proposition.

The 'Abbâsids' grip on power was under much strain. Although the decline is generally dated to the reign of al-Mutawakkil, the disintegration had begun earlier. One sees clear signs of it during the days of al-Rashîd if not even earlier. Control of the far western flank of the empire had been counted as lost; the Umayyads had control of al-Andalus and the Aghlabids[10] of North Africa had by al-Rashîd's time become autonomous. The eastern flank fared somewhat better but Bâbak was proving far mightier than anybody had expected, the Ṭâhirids were getting themselves more deeply entrenched as a dynastic regime. Moreover, the battle cries of various rebelling groups were loudly heard in the empire's very heart. The division of the empire between al-Amîn and al-Ma'mûn not only failed to bear the fruits of stability envisioned by al-Rashîd, but rather resulted in the chaos of the fourth Civil War.

This is essentially the broader context in which Proposition III is couched. It is argued by the proponents of this view that al-Ma'mûn sensed that the strong political and religious, or better politico-religious, leadership, of a pontificating guardian of the Community was the only viable means for reversing the tide. Let us expand on this.

Nagel (1975) stresses the crucial role of the title of *imâm* which al-Ma'mûn made use of possibly in a bid to gain support through playing on religious sentiment. This began around the year 198/813-4 with his "letter of the army" (*risâlat al-khamîs*) which Nagel (1975, 136 ff.) analyzes at length.

According to Nagel, al-Ma'mûn developed in his *risâlat al-khamîs* the concept of the caliphate into a full-fledged politico-religious institution. Al-Ma'mûn spoke of the caliph as being an "*imâm al-hudâ*"[11] (imam of right guidance), possessing, as such, faculties inspired by God. Not everybody can be an *imâm*. God chooses such a person and the choice is confined to those from the family of the Prophet (to which al-Ma'mûn belonged). In this conception, Nagel continues, man is portrayed as weak, neither endowed with the talent to choose an *imâm* nor with the ability to conduct his affairs without guidance. It is the duty of the *imâm*, whom God endowed with superhuman knowledge, to educate people and guide them onto the right path to obey the divine laws and to lead a praiseworthy life. To "guide rightly", the *imâm*/caliph must rely not only on the revealed law of God but also on his deeds as a secular leader (Nagel 1975, 145).

Having elevated the *imâm* – via God's choice and revelation, the superhuman knowledge he possesses, and a hereditary line to the Prophet – al-Ma'mûn placed himself "über den Zwist der Theologen und über die Kämpfe der religiös-politischen Strömungen... (Nagel 1975, 150). Consequently, he was fully equipped, and had the complete authority, to

educate and to dictate. In Nagel's opinion, the basis for a theocratic rulership was thus laid by al-Ma'mûn. In so doing, al-Ma'mûn hoped to achieve the unity of the Community in both the religious and political spheres. In sum, Nagel argues that the *risâlat al-khamîs*, written so early in al-Ma'mûn's reign, laid the foundation for al-Ma'mûn's vision of the caliph as the God-inspired, God-chosen, God-heeding man —an *imâm* whom at least those who venerated the institution of the imamate held to be infallible and immaculate.[12]

According to other writers, for the caliph the affirmation of his status was only half the battle. To assure success, al-Ma'mûn needed to destroy the position of those who might challenge such self-portrayal and question the authority the claimant was arrogating to himself. These were the *'ulamâ'*, the learned men of influence and traditionists for whom the near-literalist Ibn Ḥanbal had become a symbol. Lapidus (1975) highlights this sector of the opposition.

Lapidus describes "the enormous political and ideological problems" (1975, 378) which the caliph faced and which have been briefly outlined above. To counteract the opposition of the men within the field of religion, al-Ma'mûn extended the claims of the caliphate by "vesting it with ... extensive religious authority and control of ritual and doctrine" (Lapidus 1975, 378). The changes which the caliph introduced came in steps separated by stretches of years. Thus, "in the ... year [212/827] al-Ma'mûn ... announced his support for the doctrine of the created Qur'ân". Three years later, he "declared new variations in the standard prayer sequence and ordered that three *'takbîr'*[13] be said" (Lapidus 1975, 378). Naturally, "this religious policy caused consternation in *'ulamâ'* circles", Lapidus continues, and the caliph's answer was to enact what he hoped would be the *coup de grâce*, the *miḥna* of 218/833 (Lapidus 1975, 379).

Lapidus is of the opinion —and others like Abusaq (1971, 28), for instance, agree with him— that the *miḥna* had more goals than simply to quell the opposition to the createdness of the Koran doctrine. Its purpose went even beyond signaling in no uncertain terms where the caliph/*imâm* stood vis-à-vis the group of enlightened men (the *'ulamâ'* in general) whose growing independence posed an ominous threat "for the separation of state and religion" (Lapidus 1975, 365). The *miḥna*, asserts Lapidus, "was also a response" if not a challenge to those "who asserted the priority of *kitâb* [the Book] and *sunna* against the authority of the Caliph" (Lapidus 1975, 379).

The views of Nagel and Lapidus just summarized are congruent with opinions formulated by other scholars but with differences in detail and accent. The issues which Lapidus stresses, for example, are in harmony with Watt's (1973) reflections though Watt reads less confrontation and

more conciliation in the caliph's maneuvers than Lapidus does; and though both agree that the caliph was eager to unite the Community, Watt sees al-Ma'mûn's measures as a many-sided attempt to neutralize factionalism while Lapidus sees them as having been targeted at suppressing the "Khurasanian tradition of militant opposition to the Caliphate" (Lapidus 1975, 382). Similarly Sourdel's remark – that "...jamais auparavant on n'avait vu un calife se présenter comme un 'docteur', chargé par Dieu d'éclairer la communauté et de lui communiquer la science qui lui avait été confiée" (Sourdel 1962, 44) – is actually another way of stating what Nagel was to expand on later.

The views of Hinds (*EI2*, s.v. *miḥna*) and Crone and Hinds (1986) can be seen in the same light – though they do not consider al-Ma'mûn's claim to authority to have been a novelty. According to Hinds, al-Ma'mûn's maneuvers meant "to reestablish ... that type of caliphal religious authority ... which had ... been familiar in the time of the Umayyad caliphate". Crone and Hinds (1986, 21) agree with Lapidus that the caliphal authority which al-Ma'mûn was after would, indeed, "leave no room for *'ulamâ'*: if God manifests His will through caliphs here and now, there is no need to seek guidance from scholars" whose stock in trade was to "remember what a prophet had said in the past."

Summing up, the above works maintain that the caliph's adoption of the doctrine and the *miḥna* were a reflection of an attempt on his part to spell out what the term "caliph" stood for, thereby giving the caliphal institution that spirit of secular-sacred authority which would allow the incumbent to rule supreme over a united and strong Islamic Community. Here again, we pause to ask: does this conception of the caliphate satisfactorily explain both events?

3.2. Description of the research

This paragraph sets forth the points of departure of this study. It also acquaints the reader with the primary sources that have been used and how and why these particular ones were selected.

3.2.1. Points of departure

This study is inspired by the works we have just reviewed and its propositions have been derived from them. Its specific aim can be stated in the form of two parallel questions. (1) What factor (or factors) motivated al-Ma'mûn to declare the view that the Koran was created? (2) What factor (or factors) motivated him to issue the *miḥna* decree six years later?

As is evident from these questions, the study construes al-Ma'mûn's declaration of the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran as an issue in

its own right. Further, our concern centers primarily on the motivation which underlies the two events, not on the general policies of the caliph which intrigued other researchers and wherein the events were two of numerous other particulars. These are two points of departure to be articulated presently, and which will be followed by a few statements advocating the use of an extensive and broad range of primary sources.

3.2.1.1. Al-Ma'mûn's public declaration of the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran and his ordering the miḥna as two separate issues

Given that scholars have treated the public declaration that the Koran was created and the *miḥna* as two events among many, and that the *miḥna* was enacted to enforce the earlier event, it is understandable that the caliph's declaration about the Koran came to be subsumed under the more dramatic of the two, the *miḥna* decree. However, there was a time lapse of six years between the two events. We cannot assume that the al-Ma'mûn of 212/827 —then enjoying a period of relative repose— was, in 218/833, confronting the same set of circumstances. As may be recalled from the last chapter, in 218/833 the caliph was in Tarsus, preparing to engage the Byzantine empire in battle; he had just put down an insurrection in Egypt, one that was of such stubbornness as to require his personal superintendence. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the configuration and dynamics of the circumstances and forces prevailing in 212/827 were not the same six years later. Hence, in collecting and analyzing relevant information from the primary sources, the caliph's declaration that the Koran was created and his *miḥna* decree were treated as separate events.

3.2.1.2. Placing the createdness of the Koran doctrine and the miḥna order on center stage, not in the periphery

The main concern of scholars has generally been to understand the overall policies of al-Ma'mûn and to place his reign within the mainstream of the 'Abbâsid caliphate. This aim, which differs from ours, made it necessary for them to dwell —some briefly, others longer— on all of the caliph's important actions and decisions, which also happen to include the two issues in question.

An approach which focuses on the broader picture has its merits, but it tends to push otherwise pivotal segments of the picture to the sideline —and occasionally into insignificance. Al-Dûrî (1945), for instance, even saw fit to make no mention whatsoever of the *miḥna* in his chapter on al-Ma'mûn and his caliphate; the createdness of the Koran issue was only casually mentioned by him. In the present study, however, I have placed both of the issues and the circumstances, events and persons immediately

surrounding them in the foreground. This perspective represents a reversal in the manner in which the two issues have been treated except in the case of two studies, one by Patton (1897) and the other by Abusaq (1971).

Patton's study focuses on the *miḥna*, permitting him to bring into sharp relief the most salient features of the Ḥanbalite school of law and the role of its founder, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. Similarly, construing the *miḥna* as a pivot upon which other events rotated, Abusaq was able to sketch and account for the evolution and development of numerous theological factions and orientations. Beyond this point of articulation, wherein the *miḥna* (and, for us, the createdness of the Koran declaration as well) is accorded centrality and treated as the research issue *par excellence*, we part company with both Patton and Abusaq. Their perspective was theological and the questions which directed their scrutiny were embedded in what happened as a result of it. Our interest lies in the motivational sphere and our questions revolve around why the declaration was made and why the *miḥna* was introduced.

3.2.1.3. The range of the primary source material used

That there are differences in explaining the *miḥna* has become evident in both the general survey (3.1) and the more specific one (3.1.1.). Subjectivity naturally plays an important role but it is unlikely to be the sole basis for these variations. The specific sources an author selects is probably a contributory factor and one that warrants special attention.

A "master list" of all the major primary sources which have something to say about al-Ma'mûn or either of the two issues was compiled. This was to serve as the initial basis for this research; this list was checked against the primary sources which Rifâ'î (1927), Gabrieli (1929), Amîn (1933-6), Nagel (1975), Sourdel (1962) and Watt (1973) have used to explain the two events. As a result, the range of the primary sources used in this investigation was wider than what was used by others who have written extensively on the research topic.

3.2.2. The primary sources: selection and analysis

3.2.2.1. Selection of the primary sources

The final list of sources used, broken down into six categories, appears in Table 1.

Table 1
The primary sources used in this study and their chronology

Chronicler:	Title of the work:
Works of Ta'rîkh ("history", general and local):	
al-Khalîfa b. Khayyât (d. 240/854),	*Ta'rîkh*
al-Azraqî, (d. 244/858),	*Akhbâr Makka*
Muḥammad b. Ḥabîb (d. 245/859-60),	*Kitâb al-muḥabbar*
Ṣâliḥ b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, (d. 265/878),	*Sîrat Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*
Ḥanbal b. Isḥâq b. Ḥanbal, (d. 273/886),	*Dhikr miḥnat al-imâm Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*
Ibn Qutayba, (d. 276/889),	*Kitâb al-ma'ârif*
------,	*'Uyûn al-akhbâr*
Pseudo-Ibn Qutayba,	*Kitâb al-imâma wa al-siyâsa*
al-Fasawî, Ya'qûb b. Sufyân, (d. 277/890),	*Kitâb al-ma'ârif wa al-ta'rîkh*
al-Balâdhurî (d. 279/892),	*Futûḥ al-buldân*
Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr (d. 280/893),	*Kitâb Baghdâd*
al-Dînawarî (d. ca. 282/895),	*Kitâb al-akhbâr al-ṭiwâl*
al-Ya'qûbî (d. 284/897),	*Mushâkalat al-nâs li-zamânihim*
------,	*Ta'rîkh*
al-Ṭabarî (d. 310/923),	*Ta'rîkh al-rusul wa al-mulûk*
al-Djahshiyârî (d. 331/942),	*Kitâb al-wuzarâ' wa al-kuttâb*
al-Tamîmî (d. 331/944-5),	*Kitâb al-miḥan*
al-Azdî (d. 334/946),	*Ta'rîkh al-Mawṣil*
al-Mas'ûdî (d. 345/956),	*Murûdj al-dhahab wa ma'âdin al-djawhar*
------,	*Kitâb al-tanbîh wa al-ishrâf*
al-Kindî (d. 350/961),	*Kitâb al-wulât wa kitâb al-quḍât*
al-Maqdisî (d. 355/966),	*Kitâb bad' al-khalq wa al-ta'rîkh*
al-Iṣfahânî (d. 356/967),	*Maqâtil al-ṭâlibiyyîn*
Ibn Bâbawayh (Ibn Bâbûya), (d. ca. 381/991),	*'Uyûn akhbâr al-Riḍâ*
al-Shâbushtî (d. 399/1008),	*Kitâb al-diyârât*
Sâwîris (Ibn al-Muqaffa'), (d. before 393-4/1003)	*Ta'rîkh baṭâriqat al-kanîsa al-miṣriyya*
Miskawayh (d. 421/1030),	*Tadjârib al-umam*
al-Ṣâbî (d. 448/1056),	*Rusûm dâr al-khilâfa*

Anonymous,	*Kitâb al-ʿuyûn wa al-ḥadâ'iq fî akhbâr al-ḥaqâ'iq* (written toward the end of 5th/11th century)
Mârî b. Sulaymân, (d. ca. 545/1150)	*"Commentaria"*
Michael the Syrian, (595-6/1199)	*Chronique*
Ibn al-Djawzî (d. 597/1200),	*Manâqib Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*
Ibn al-Athîr (d. 630/1233),	*al-Kâmil fî al-târîkh*
Ibn al-Abbâr (d. 658/1260),	*Iʿtâb al-kuttâb*
Ibn al-ʿIbrî (Bar Hebraeus), (d. 681/1286),	*Mukhtaṣar al-duwal*
al-Irbilî (d. 692/1293),	*Kashf al-ghumma bi-maʿrifat al-aʾimma*
Ibn Ṭiqṭaqâ (d. 709/1309),	*al-Kitâb al-fakhrî fî âdâb al-sulṭâniyya wa al-duwal al-islâmiyya*
al-Dhahabî (d. 748/1348),	*Tardjamat al-imâm Aḥmad* which is part of his *Taʾrîkh al-islâm*;
Ibn Kathîr (d. 774/1373),	*al-Bidâya wa al-nihâya*
Ibn Khaldûn (d. 808/1406),	*ʿIbar* (which includes the *Muqaddima*)
Ibn al-Taghrîbirdî (d. 874/1470),	*al-Nudjûm al-zâhira fî mulûk Miṣr wa al-Qâhira*
al-Suyûṭî, (d. 911/1505),	*Taʾrîkh al-khulafâ'*

Ṭabaqât ("biographical dictionaries" and genealogical works):

Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845),	*Kitâb al-ṭabaqât al-kabîr*
Wakîʿ (d. 306/918),	*Akhbâr al-quḍât wa tawârîkhihim*, known as *Ṭabaqât al-quḍât*
Abû Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahânî, (d. 430/1038),	*Ḥilyat al-awliyâ' wa ṭabaqât al-aṣfiyâ'*
al-Khaṭîb al-Baghdâdî, (d. 463/1071),	*Taʾrîkh Baghdâd*
Ibn Abî Yaʿlâ (d. 526/1131),	*Ṭabaqât al-ḥanâbila*
Yâqût (d. 626/1229),	*Muʿdjam al-udaba' (Irshâd al-arîb ilâ maʿrifat al-adîb)*
Ibn al-Qiftî, (d. 646/1248),	*Taʾrîkh al-ḥukamâ'*
Ibn Khallikân (d. 681/1282),	*Kitâb wafayât al-aʿyân wa anbâ' abnâ' al-zamân*
al-Dhahabî (d. 748/1348),	*Tadhkirat al-ḥuffâẓ*
——————,	*Mîzân al-iʿtidâl*

al-Ṣafadî (d. 764/1363),	*al-Wâfî bi-al-wafayât*
al-Ṣubkî (d. 771/1370),	*Ṭabaqât al-shâfi'iyya*
Ibn al-Murtaḍâ (d. 840/1437),	*Ṭabaqât al-mu'tazila*
Ibn Ḥadjar al-'Asqalânî, (d. 852/1449),	*Tahdhîb al-tahdhîb*
----------,	*Lisân al-mîzân*
Ibn al-'Imâd, (d. 1089/1679),	*Shadharât al-dhahab fî akhbâr man dhahab*

Works of adab ("literary compositions"):

Ibn 'Abdrabbihi, (d. 328/940),	*al-'Iqd al-farîd*
al-Iṣfahânî, (d. 356/967),	*Kitâb al-aghânî*
al-Ṭanûkhî, (d. 994),	*Nishwâr al-muḥâḍara*
al-Tha'âlibî, (d. 1038),	*Laṭâ'if al-ma'ârif*

Theoretical works:

al-Djâḥiz (d. 255/868-9),	*Rasâ'il*
al-Khayyâṭ (d. ca 300/913),	*Kitâb al-intiṣâr*
al-Nawbakhtî, (d. ca. 300/912),	*Firaq al-shî'a*
al-Baghdâdî (d. 429/1037),	*al-Farq bayn al-firaq*
al-Mâwardî (d. 450/1058),	*Kitâb al-aḥkâm al-sulṭâniyya.*
Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064),	*Kitâb al-faṣl fî al-milal*
Ibn al-Farrâ' (d. 458/1065),	*al-aḥkâm al-sulṭâniyya*
al-Shahrastânî, (d. 548/1153),	*Kitâb al-milal wa al-niḥal*

Other works:

Ibn al-Nadîm (d. ca. 377/998),	*Kitâb al-fihrist*

Collections:

Ṣafwat, A.Z.,	*Djamharat rasâ'il al-'arab. Vol. III and IV*

This list represents a broad range of both time span and chroniclers. It includes every chronicle whose use is considered "standard" by those who researched this area. The list represents both universal and local histories (42); biographical dictionaries and genealogical works (16); *adab* works (4); theoretical works (8); other works (1); and, collections (1). The time spanned by the list is the period from the *miḥna* itself (our earliest

chronicler – Ibn Sa'd – died twelve years after the introduction of the *miḥna* and was in fact himself one of the first to be interrogated) to 1089/1679, some eight centuries later.

Appendix One summarizes the information available on all the chroniclers whose works were used in this study. However, what is known about the lives, intellectual orientations, partisan inclinations or prejudices of most of our chroniclers is disappointingly little.

3.2.2.2. Analysis of the sources

The primary sources have been examined in the chronological sequence suggested by the dates appearing in Table 1 under the names of the chroniclers. The rationale for this procedure goes beyond the economy which an orderly process is likely to yield. We need to know al-Ma'mûn from every possible perspective including that of time. While we will never know the "objective truth" about this man and his motives in declaring the createdness of the Koran or ordering the *miḥna*, it is important to try to capture the "images" which successive generations of chroniclers may have projected of him. With this in mind, each source mentioning al-Ma'mûn or his reign has been scrutinized for any reference to the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran or the *miḥna* and for whatever material which can throw light on his motives for taking the actions at issue. The three propositions presented in this chapter were continually used as focal frameworks for gathering the information. Data in favor or against each proposition were noted. What the results of this inquiry were, is the subject of Chapters Four and Five.

VIABILITY OF THE EXPLANATIONS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORKS OF PROPOSITIONS I AND II

Two paragraphs make up this chapter. The first deals with the viability of Mu'tazilism as an explanation for al-Ma'mûn's public declaration of the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran and the *miḥna* order. A parallel paragraph, the second, explores the viability of Shi'ism as an explanation for these same two events.

4.1. The viability of Mu'tazilism as an explanation (Proposition I)

Information relevant to this proposition is grouped under two themes. The first is grounded in the caliph's relation to Mu'tazilite thinkers and the other in the possible affinity he may have had with their views.

Al-Ma'mûn, we are told, associated with the Mu'tazilites al-Nazzâm[1] and Abû al-Hudhayl who was said to have been a teacher of the caliph.[2] Ibn al-Murtaḍâ, the 9th/15th century writer who composed a Mu'tazilite *Ṭabaqât* work, quotes verses reportedly recited by al-Ma'mûn in praise of Abû al-Hudhayl.[3] Thumâma b. Ashras was an intimate of al-Ma'mûn[4] and the esteem accorded to him by the caliph was enjoyed by another Mu'tazilite, al-Fuwaṭî, as well.[5] Finally, in his last will and testament, al-Ma'mûn advised his brother and successor, al-Mu'taṣim, to take to heart the counsel of Ibn Abî Du'âd on all matters.[6]

It is apparent that the caliph was close to a number of leading Mu'tazilite thinkers. Such a relationship in and of itself does not, however, necessarily translate into adherence to Mu'tazilite ideology. Moreover, the caliph was close to many men who were not Mu'tazilites and, in some cases, even anti-Mu'tazilite. Bishr al-Marîsî, for example – over whose corpse at the funeral the caliph prayed[7] – is thought to have been a follower of Ḍirâr b. 'Amr who was considered by the Mu'tazilites as their opponent (Van Ess 1967-8, 30 ff.). Yaḥyâ b. Aktham[8] is another example. He was a foe of the Mu'tazilites, yet al-Ma'mûn valued his counsel[9] and appointed him as his chief judge and kept him in service during the *miḥna* despite his partiality to the views held by those who refused to give in to the caliph's pressures.

The line of evidence which links al-Ma'mûn to Mu'tazilism on grounds of shared convictions is somewhat more credible than the one based on personal contacts – but it is also circumstantial. A number of sources describe the caliph as having been a Mu'tazilite. The heresiographer al-Baghdâdî (5th/11th century) states that al-Ma'mûn was a Mu'tazilite and tells us that he was enticed to be one by Thumâma b. Ashras.[10] Similarly, the 11th/17th century Hanbalite compiler Ibn al-'Imâd also explicitly states that al-Ma'mûn was a Mu'tazilite.[11] According to a list given in the *Ṭabaqât al-mu'tazila*, al-Ma'mûn was amongst those caliphs who held Mu'tazilite views; indeed, this work includes a statement in which the caliph reportedly boasted that none of his 'Abbâsid predecessors had held the Djabrite position,[12] the deterministic stance which runs counter to the Mu'tazilite stress on indeterminism. Lacking in nuance and details as these narratives are, the chroniclers, especially later ones, appear to have been too keen on fitting the caliph into a classificatory mold or tagging a "label" on him in some cases perhaps to arouse suspicion.

A number of earlier sources give somewhat more nuanced portrayals of al-Ma'mûn's beliefs. Al-Mas'ûdî states that after al-Ma'mûn came from Khurasan to Baghdad he made his views known on divine unity (*al-tawḥîd*) as well as threat and promise (*al-wa'd wa al-wa'îd*) – both being Mu'tazilite principles.[13] Al-Ya'qûbî reports that, whilst in Damascus in 218/833, the caliph himself commenced interrogating people about the Mu'tazilite principles of "unity and justice"[14] and related issues.[15] In his letters ordering the *miḥna*, al-Ma'mûn stressed the absolute unity of God (deducing from it, amongst other arguments, the createdness of the Koran).[16] This very same theme is repeated in the caliph's last will and testament.[17]

One of our earliest sources, Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr, provides the most detailed information on al-Ma'mûn's theological position. This information casts doubt on the notion that al-Ma'mûn's commitment to Mu'tazilite ideology was as strong as some reports suggest – let alone that he was a Mu'tazilite. Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr reports that Thumâma b. Ashras, the Mu'tazilite intimate of the caliph, stated that al-Ma'mûn had abandoned the Qadarite position (indeterminism)[18] which is crucial to Mu'tazilite thinking.[19] The fact that this statement was reportedly made by a prominent Mu'tazilite thinker – who surely knew what his words meant – adds weight to the view that al-Ma'mûn did hold a position that was directly incongruous with the Mu'tazilite stance. Additionally, Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr reports on two different occasions that al-Ma'mûn considered himself to have been a Murdji'ite[20] – a position which placed him outside the Mu'tazilite circle.[21]

In short, the available information presented above gives us no confidant grounds to conclude that al-Ma'mûn was a Mu'tazilite.[22] He associated with Mu'tazilites but also with others. And while al-Ma'mûn and the Mu'tazilites shared some views, he was by no means of Mu'tazilite persuasion through and through as some scholars would have us believe;[23] at best al-Ma'mûn's views were eclectic.

Most likely, the tendency of depicting al-Ma'mûn as a Mu'tazilite rests firmly on those acts of his which left an indelible imprint on posterity, namely his public declaration of the createdness of the Koran and especially his edict to enforce it later through the *miḥna*. This depiction owes much to the writings of several late Sunnite chroniclers from the sixth/twelfth till eighth/fourteenth centuries and who, looking back at events in the distant past, sought to reconcile what they considered al-Ma'mûn's negative actions on the one hand with the otherwise positive image they had of him on the other. The Mu'tazilites, who no longer had any political power after al-Mutawakkil banned them to oblivion and whose rationalistic orientation had repelled generations of traditionists, may have served as a convenient vehicle for harmonizing these writers' conflicting views on al-Ma'mûn. Ibn al-Djawzî (6th/12th century, p. 309), for instance, dwelling on the caliph's hesitancy both in speaking publicly of the doctrine and the *miḥna* order, takes the view that the caliph finally said that the Koran was created under the sway of the Mu'tazilites.[24] Al-Ṣafadî (8th/14th century, p. 655), noting the caliph's knowledge and skills in the sciences and philosophy —which the Mu'tazilites shared fully— adopts the position that it was this sophistication which had attracted al-Ma'mûn to the createdness of the Koran doctrine, an assertion to which Ibn al-Taghrîbirdî, (9th/15th century, p. 2:225) also subscribes. Formulating it somewhat differently, al-Subkî (8th/14th century, p. 2:56-7) pins the blame for the adoption of the doctrine on the shallowness of al-Ma'mûn's knowledge in the sciences and philosophy rather than on these fields of endeavor as such.

The views of the chroniclers I have just cited and of countless others who preceded and followed them center above all on the fact that there was a convergence of views between al-Ma'mûn and the Mu'tazilites on the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran. Such a congruence of views, however, does not make al-Ma'mûn a Mu'tazilite. At the time of al-Ma'mûn the doctrine in question was by no means restricted to the Mu'tazilites, but was shared by others,[25] notably the Ḥanafites who, incidentally, were not of one mind on the issue.[26] And in his letters on the *miḥna* where al-Ma'mûn made use of arguments current among the Mu'tazilites,[27] the caliph also incorporated an argument from the teachings of the school of Abû Ḥanîfa,[28] then the most dominant one in Iraq

and in which the caliph was well-versed.[29] The Abû Ḥanîfa argued, as did al-Ma'mûn,[30] in more than one letter (see 5.3.1), that the Koran must be created because all things other than God are by definition created – which is a different argument than the one primarily used by the Mu'tazilites.[31] For the Mu'tazilites, the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran was grounded in their stance on the nature of God while the Ḥanafite position centered more on the status of objects. In addition to these main arguments of the Mu'tazilites and the Ḥanafites, al-Ma'mûn also syllogistically interpreted Koranic verses to affirm the view that the Koran was an object which was "made" (*dja'ala*) and thus created by God.

So much for the issue of al-Ma'mûn and Mu'tazilism as well as his public declaration of the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran which was among the Mu'tazilites' teachings, though not exclusively theirs. As to a possible connection between the Mu'tazilites and al-Ma'mûn regarding the *miḥna* itself as an edict or process, evidence in the primary sources is lacking.[32]

Summing up, the caliph did in all likelihood find the company of some Mu'tazilite *mutakallimûn* congenial and some of their views attractive. But we have no convincing evidence to indicate that he could be counted among their ranks let alone that he was so thoroughly committed to Mu'tazilite views as to make these views a foundation for his actions. Having said this, I need to stress that this lack of evidence does not put the matter to complete rest or necessarily mean that Mu'tazilism did not contribute in any way to the occurrence of the two events at hand; the weight of the evidence simply suggests that we have to look elsewhere for a more viable explanation for the caliph's actions than the sole Mu'tazilite connection offers.

4.2. The viability of Shi'ism as an explanation (Proposition II)

In dealing with this topic every effort will be made to draw a line between the 'Alids on the one hand and the Shi'ites on the other – which is not easy since the terms are often used interchangeably. The advantages of making such a distinction will become apparent at the end of this chapter. The first part of the discussion will address the viability of Shi'ism as an explanation, to be followed by an exploration of al-Ma'mûn's connections with the 'Alids which Gabrieli (1929) in particular has fully documented.

Sourdel (1962) has identified three concrete issues which according to him signify a close affinity between the views of the caliph and mainstream Shi'ites. These are the *mut'a* marriage,[33] the *takbîr*[34] ritual, and the imamate.

Sourdel (1962, 41) uses as point of departure the view that the *mut'a* marriage —which al-Ma'mûn contemplated proclaiming as permissible— was an exclusively Shi'ite institution. The *mut'a* had its ups and downs all through the ages. Some Shi'ite groups opposed it and there were times when some Sunnite groups sanctioned it.[35] In light of this information, the caliph's stand on the *mut'a* tells us very little about his Shi'ite leanings; Heffening, though, (*EI2* s.v. "*mut'a*") provides support for Sourdel's interpretation, for, after presenting the differing views on *mut'a* during the first two centuries of Islam, he states in effect that al-Ma'mûn's stand on *mut'a* can "certainly" be construed as reflecting "his Shî'î sympathies" since by that time standard convictions on *mut'a* had come into existence. On the other hand, however, we are told by al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî[36] — whose report was used by Sourdel— that once the caliph had learned from Yahyâ b. Aktham that 'Alî b. Abî Tâlib was opposed to the *mut'a*, he abandoned the idea of declaring it permissible. And one might argue that the caliph's "contemplation" of permitting the *mut'a* reflects not so much a Shi'ite leaning but rather deference to and reverence for 'Alî b. Abî Tâlib (see 4.2.1).

Chroniclers report two episodes on the *takbîr*. In the year 216/832, al-Ma'mûn ordered his governor in Baghdad to have the troops there pronounce three additional *takbîr*s after their daily prayers.[37] Sourdel (1962, 41-2) interprets this supplementary *takbîr* as a Shi'ite practice. He bases this interpretation on a report by the Fâtimid legal expert al-Qâdî al-Nu'mân in which we are told that three *takbîr*s after the final *taslîm*[38] were recommended by Dja'far al-Sâdiq.[39] This report tells us, however, that the three *takbîr*s referred to by Dja'far al-Sâdiq constituted only a part of an elaborate formula which he suggested for ending the prayer. This formula comprised many more religious declarations than the three *takbîr*s, and it was Dja'far al-Sâdiq's suggestion that the formula in its entirety should be repeated ten times. There is no mention of this extended version in al-Ma'mûn's order. Moreover, according to a number of representative Shi'ite texts, the sum of *takbîr*s after the *taslîm* was not fixed and could optionally range from one to seven.[40] Lacking more concrete evidence to the contrary, it is probably safe to give the caliph's directive the more parsimonious interpretation that it was simply intended to arouse some religious zeal among the troops at the eve of a great campaign rather than to proselytize for the Shi'ites.[41]

The second episode around *takbîr* concerns the funeral ritual. Quite correctly, Sourdel takes this as evidence to support his thesis and with this item Van Ess (1967, 94=1990, 177) concurs. Sourdel (1962, 45) rightly points out that, in his last will,[42] al-Ma'mûn requested that five *takbîr*s, a hallmark of the Shi'ites,[43] be said at his funeral.

Finally, Sourdel (1965, 43-4) argues that al-Ma'mûn had ascribed to the caliph those qualities which the Shi'ites associated with the leader of the Community, its *imâm*. Sourdel is correct in making this observation, and such an ascription by al-Ma'mûn is quite evident throughout his entire reign and especially in the preambles to his first and third letters of the *miḥna* to be dealt with in Chapter Five. Sourdel's opinion is subscribed to in general terms by Nagel and Watt but with important nuances. Nagel (1975, 386 ff.) finds the caliph's conception to be closest to that of the Zaydites; Watt (1973, 177-9) sees it as reflecting a Shi'ite vision, but then goes on to speculate how this is linked to the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran[44] – a line of thinking which does not find favor with Hinds (*EI2* s.v. "*miḥna*"), and for a good reason. Hinds takes issue with Watt largely on theological grounds. Hinds states that Watt's argument misses the point since the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran is not about the Book as such but about the nature of God, or more properly, God's Unity.

Central to those who argue in favor of the Shi'ite/Zaydite theme is that al-Ma'mûn employed the title "*imâm*". In at least three formal documents al-Ma'mûn used the terms caliph and *imâm* interchangeably. The first time this usage occurred was in the *risâlat al-khamîs* around 198/813-4.[45] The second formal document was that of 'Alî's designation in 201/817.[46] The third is to be found in the document which initiated the *miḥna*.[47] *Imâm* was also used with regard to al-Ma'mûn on three other occasions.[48] However, al-Ma'mûn was not the only or first 'Abbâsid caliph to officially use the title of *imâm*.[49] Arazi and El'ad[50] provide us with a long list of references in major historical sources (amongst which al-Ṭabarî, al-Djahshiyârî, al-Azdî and al-Ya'qûbî) where al-Ma'mûn's 'Abbâsid predecessors referred to themselves as "*imâm*s" both officially and informally. A coin (issued in the year 193/808-9) with the inscription "*al-imâm Muḥammad* [al-Amîn]" has been unearthed.[51]

Yet, scholars who stress the Shi'ite/Zaydite theme could have argued their case more persuasively on grounds more substantive than the use of the title of *imâm*, namely the issue of the authority to which the caliph is entitled, for this touches the core of the caliphal institution and one in which all Islamic groups had a stake. The Shi'ites, Zaydites included, had always held the view that the *imâm* was entitled to unquestioned authority in all matters, spiritual and worldly. The title of *khalîfat Allâh* which al-Ma'mûn asserted as his birthright (see 5.2) and used on coins[52] also involved this all-encompassing authority. On this core issue of limitless authority in the hands of the leader of the Community (be he called caliph or *imâm*) al-Ma'mûn and the Shi'ites had obviously a convergence of views. Having said this, however, I need to emphasize in summing up,

that I do not interpret the caliph's actions (declaration/*miḥna*) as reflected in the primary sources to have been directly motivated by Shi'ite leanings or affinities, political or religious, as such. Had a deference to Shi'ite views been a motivational factor, the caliph would have declared the Koran as uncreated rather than created since this appears to have been the prevailing view amongst mainstream Shi'ites at the time. According to Madelung's (1965) thorough analysis of the ideologies of representative Shi'ite theologians, at the time of al-Ma'mûn most groups followed the teachings of Dja'far al-Ṣâdiq (known later as the sixth *imâm*) who held the view that the Koran was uncreated, a view cited during the later *miḥna* by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in his personal defence against those who wanted him to profess that it was created.[53] Hence, a Shi'ite "connection" does not serve as a satisfactory basis for an explanation of the caliph's actions.

4.2.1. Al-Ma'mûn and the 'Alids

I have concluded above that the bond between al-Ma'mûn and the Shi'ites acquired its meaning on grounds of a partial convergence of views. Conversely, the bond between the caliph and the 'Alids had manifold and deep roots which will become evident in this paragraph; an explanation for this bond will be sketched in the subparagraph that follows it (4.2.1.1). It should, however, be pointed out immediately – and this is my logic in separating the 'Alids and the Shi'ites – that what can be said with regard to the one group does not necessarily mean that it applies to the other.[54]

Al-Ma'mûn held 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib in the highest esteem; he was manifestly partial to his progeny, the 'Alids; and al-Ma'mûn went so far as to offer sharing the caliphate with them. Let us consider now, one by one, these three themes.

Perhaps the clearest indication of al-Ma'mûn's reverence for 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib was his public declaration in 212/827 that 'Alî was the best of mankind after the Prophet.[55] This public declaration was a restatement of what he had said more than a decade earlier, pointing out then that the preeminence of 'Alî (*tafḍîl 'Alî*) did not necessarily entail a demeaning of other early Muslims (*al-salaf*).[56]

About the same time as the public declaration of the preeminence of 'Alî, the caliph announced that any one who spoke favorably of Mu'âwiya would be doing so at his own peril.[57] There is evidence that al-Ma'mûn had thought of this "cursing of Mu'âwiya" before he actually issued the warning.[58] Al-Mas'ûdî, himself probably of Shi'ite persuasion, is the only chronicler who gives an explanation for this decision. In a rather intricate story he implies that al-Ma'mûn had taken offense because Mu'âwiya had

spoken of the first caliphs of Islam skipping over 'Alî as though the fourth caliph had never existed.[59] Nowhere have I encountered evidence to contradict this highly favorable stance by al-Ma'mûn vis-à-vis 'Alî b. Abî Tâlib. All relevant material I came across points in the same direction. Ibn Abî Tâhir Tayfûr[60] includes a report – perhaps of dubious authenticity – that al-Ma'mûn had given 'Alî b. Abî Tâlib precedence (*qaddama*) over his own ancestor al-'Abbâs; the chronicler himself notes that it is a "remarkable (curious) report" (*khabar 'adjîb*). Considering, however, the priority which al-Ma'mûn gave to the totality of the Hâshimite family over particular members of it (see below), the report may not be as peculiar as it sounds. Less credible are such extreme narratives as one encounters in a number of Shi'ite writings.[61]

The progeny of 'Alî also enjoyed the caliph's favor and he consistently spoke of the 'Alids as his family. On his way to Baghdad from Khurasan, for example, al-Ma'mûn told a number of 'Alids that they and the 'Abbâsids were one and the same,[62] and on another occasion, he explicitly identified himself with them.[63]

There are other ways in which the caliph's favoritism to the 'Alids found expression. He designated 'Alids to lead the pilgrimage;[64] he prayed over the bodies of deceased 'Alids,[65] including one (Muhammad b. Dja'far) who had previously led an uprising against him;[66] and, in 210/825-6, al-Ma'mûn restored the ownership of Fadak, a piece of property in the Hidjâz, to the 'Alids.[67]

The caliph favored the 'Alids till the end of his life as Sourdel (1962) and others[68] point out. In his last will and testament, al-Ma'mûn explicitly asked his successor and brother, al-Mu'tasim, to surround the 'Alids with care and he spoke of them highly while he deprecated his own immediate family, the 'Abbâsids.[69]

The third theme which reflects al-Ma'mûn's strong pro-'Alid leanings revolves around his designation of the 'Alid 'Alî b. Mûsâ as heir on 2 Ramadân 201/March 24, 817.[70] The event caught the imagination of especially a number of Shi'ite chroniclers who seized the occasion to upstage the status of al-Ridâ.[71] The caliph gave the heir-apparent the title "*al-ridâ min âl Muhammad*", the pleasing-one within the family of Muhammad (the Prophet).[72] Coins with 'Alî's name were struck to formalize the occasion[73] and the dynastic color of the 'Abbâsids, black,[74] was discarded and replaced by green[75] probably to underscore the message that the caliph was intent on breaking with the past.

There were other affirmations of this Ma'mûn-'Alid covenant and of the caliph's determination to reunite the two wings of the Hâshimite family. Amongst these was al-Ma'mûn's seeing to it that due allegiance to al-Ridâ was pledged by both his oldest son, al-'Abbâs,[76] and other military

leaders.[77] And, as successor to the caliphate, al-Riḍâ's name was added to the Friday prayer.[78] The bond between al-Ma'mûn and al-Riḍâ was further strengthened by a marriage of two of the caliph's daughters, one to 'Alî and the other to his son Muḥammad.[79]

'Alî al-Riḍâ died in 203/818. A number of explanations for his death are found in the sources but need not occupy our attention.[80] His death by no means put an end to the caliph's relationship with the deceased. Al-Ma'mûn ordered that 'Alî be buried next to his father, al-Rashîd, at Ṭûs.[81] The chroniclers report also that al-Ma'mûn publicly displayed grief over the death of 'Alî and that he personally prayed over his grave.[82] A decade after 'Alî's death al-Ma'mûn ordered (probably in 215/825-6) that the marriage between his daughter (Umm al-Faḍl) and 'Alî's son, Muḥammad, be consummated[83] – which the later Ḥanbalite writer, Ibn Kathîr[84] tries to explain away as being simply a fulfillment of the marriage contract.

When in 204/819, the caliph arrived at the town of al-Nahrawân (northeast of Baghdad) returning from Khurasan, members of his family, leading commanders and other notables – all attired in green in conformance with al-Ma'mûn's order – came to greet him. Responding to their pleadings to revert to the traditional 'Abbâsid color of black[85] this step appears to have eased at least open opposition.

According to some scholars, with the death of al-Riḍâ, the caliph's pro-'Alid policies came to an end.[86] Gabrieli (1929) construes relevant events which occurred after al-Riḍâ's death, notably al-Ma'mûn's declaration in 212/827 of the preeminence of 'Alî (and the cursing of Mu'âwiya) as mere expressions of "sentiment" rather than a restoration of the old policy; the caliph's affectionate words about the 'Alids at his deathbed in 218/833 can also be seen as expressions of sentiment. Yet, an attachment that manifested itself throughout al-Ma'mûn's reign and which endured till the caliph's last breath calls for an explanation that is both internally consistent and encompasses all relevant facts. To this subject, we shall presently turn.

4.2.1.1. An explanation of al-Ma'mûn's partiality to the 'Alids

It may well be true, as some accounts have it, that al-Ma'mûn had venerated 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib because of a debt the caliph felt the 'Abbâsids owed him,[87] an aspect that is stressed by Gabrieli (1929) as we have just seen. This explanation may go a long way in accounting for the caliph's repeatedly turning a blind eye to the numerous rebellions the 'Alids or their supporters staged against the 'Abbâsids and even his own regime. After the rebellion of Abû al-Sarâyâ was crushed, for instance, the punishment of the 'Alid in whose name the revolt had been fought, Muḥammad b.

Muḥammad, was restricted to his being brought to al-Ma'mûn in Khurasan[88] merely to be placed under house arrest.[89] To consider this and similar acts of forgiveness or the honoring of dead 'Alids by praying personally over their bodies as no more than a sentimental attachment to the memory of 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib seems to stretch the echo of a memory to extremes.

The various constructions offered by chroniclers[90] as explanations for al-Riḍâ's designation as heir strike me also as lame. The designation was treated as an isolated event which, however, needs to be fitted into a pattern that also explains the caliph's esteem for 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib, his rather inordinate accommodations to the 'Alids and why he spoke so highly of them on his deathbed and asked his successor to surround them with care.[91]

Gibb (1961, 118) stresses the point that if by the designation al-Ma'mûn had hoped to appease some rebellious Shi'ite groupings it is absolutely unclear which of these, if any, supported al-Riḍâ. Al-Riḍa was about 54 years old when al-Ma'mûn designated him his heir. All accounts agree that the man had led a retired life which was unencumbered with political entanglements. If al-Ma'mûn wanted to win over a Shi'ite group, he surely could have done better by choosing one of their pretenders instead of such a quietist. Questionable is the view of Ḥasan (1933) who stresses the caliph's need to win over Khurasanian support —that is, support of those who had put al-Ma'mûn on the throne about half a decade before the designation.

An altogether different tack is taken by Nagel (1975, 254-5) and especially Madelung (1981). Without dismissing other interpretations, Nagel and Madelung call attention to the possible contribution to the caliph's decision of a belief that was current during his reign, viz. a general feeling that the 'Abbâsid caliphate was coming to an end to be followed by the apocalypse. The Mahdi would then make his appearance. Madelung argues that al-Ma'mûn "must certainly have been aware of such predictions and expectations when he invited 'Alî al-Riḍâ from Medina in the year 200 H."[92] The appointment of al-Riḍâ may have been the result of al-Ma'mûn's belief that this was necessary to prepare the caliphate for the end of times.

It is my view that al-Ma'mûn was partial to the 'Alids for two interwoven reasons. One may, for lack of a better term, be called "political", namely bringing the 'Alids into the fold, and the other is rooted in a conviction that the 'Alids were bona fide members of the House of the Prophet at a par with the 'Abbâsids, himself included.

Al-Ma'mûn was an 'Abbâsid. The caliph's 'Abbâsid ancestors had returned 'Alid support by a slap in the face. However attractive the pro-

position may be that the caliph was moved by sentiments which included keenness to rectifying an injustice, it is more likely that his aim went farther. The repeated uprisings by the 'Alids were in themselves an ongoing reminder that more needed to be done than to urge them to "let bygones be bygones" (see above p. 47, n. 62) or merely speaking of 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib and his progeny as his cousins. Repeatedly antagonized by al-Ma'mûn's ancestors – and the memory of their oppression at the hands of al-Ma'mûn's own father still alive – the 'Alids' suspicions could only be allayed by positive action to back up expressions of sentiments. Bringing the 'Alids into the caliphal institution, through the designation of al-Riḍâ as heir, for example, is one such convincing means.

It also happens that this dramatic step and the other deeds and statements of the caliph in which all modern scholars read unmistakable favoritism for the 'Alids were in full accord with al-Ma'mûn's view that the 'Alids were just as integral a part of the Hâshimite family[93] and the House of the Prophet as their cousins, the 'Abbâsids, were.[94] In his letter of designation, al-Ma'mûn said just that. In that document we read that the caliph had "given consideration to the members of the two houses of al-'Abbâs and 'Alî but had not found anyone more excellent, more pious or more learned than 'Alî,"[95] to be the future caliph.

The 'Abbâsids of course saw it differently. They regarded the appointment of al-Riḍâ as a threat to 'Abbâsid supremacy, and feared that the caliphate would pass to the House of 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib. However, al-Ma'mûn never made any commitment about what would happen after the death of this "most excellent" of living men within the House of the Prophet. If the 'Abbâsid family's concern was self-perpetuity, that of al-Ma'mûn was centered on the perpetuity of the caliphal institution, one whose importance to Islam outweighed the perishable 'Abbâsids and 'Alids and whose survival could be assured only if it retained its continuity with the Prophet Muḥammad and was led by a man of merits. This is perhaps the reason why, upon his death, al-Ma'mûn chose as successor not his own son, al-'Abbâs, but the man he presumably deemed more fitting to carry the burden – al-Mu'taṣim.[96]

Just how seriously al-Ma'mûn took his mission of curator of the caliphal institution and how he sought to strengthen the authority the caliph had, will become manifest in the next chapter.

AN EXPLANATION OF THE *MIḤNA* AS THE INSTRUMENT WHICH AL-MA'MUN USED FOR ENFORCING HIS VISION OF THE CALIPHATE

The first paragraph of this chapter presents a succinct statement of my thesis and previews the content of the subsequent paragraphs in support of it. A description of al-Ma'mûn's vision of the caliphal institution and the place of the caliph in it occupies our attention in the second paragraph. The third paragraph deals at length with various aspects of the *miḥna* and presents further evidence in support of the thesis. First, however, a few explicit words need to be said about the status of al-Ma'mûn's declaration in 212/827 that the Koran was created.

The primary sources say very little about this declaration and nothing whatsoever about the circumstances surrounding it or why it was made. Indeed, all that the sources say is that in the year 212/827, the caliph "made public the view that the Koran was created" (*aẓhara al-qawl bi-khalq al-qur'ân*). The primary sources also provide no clues as to why al-Ma'mûn made this view known specifically in 212/827 rather than some other year. These and other considerations —to be set forth in this chapter, especially 5.3.2— lead me to take the position that the caliph's public-making of the view that the Koran was created was not an event in its own right, but a convenient means for the *miḥna* events of 218/833 (to be dealt with in 5.3.3). After all, a *miḥna* demanded an issue —preferably a doctrinal one— over which the men to be subjected to it could be tested, and the doctrine of a created Koran was suited quite eminently as such a test issue. After these preliminary remarks, we refocus the attention on where we left off.

The backbone of this chapter consists of four documents which the sources purport to be copies of the original ones written by or for al-Ma'mûn. The first of these documents, the *risâlat al-khamîs* (written around 198/813-4), is a text which carried forth a long tradition through which the 'Abbâsid caliphs sought to cement their power and its legitimacy.[1] The second text is the caliph's designation in 201/817 of 'Alî al-Riḍâ as his heir.[2] The *miḥna* letters, especially the first[3] and third[4] in the series, form the third main source. The fourth text is the caliph's last will.[5] While other studies have taken up these texts separately, their conjoint

use, especially as they span the caliph's entire reign, is likely to throw greater light on his conception of the caliphate and why the *miḥna* was initiated.

5.1. Statement of the thesis

Al-Ma'mûn's efforts to reunite the two branches of the Banû Hâshim were diligent. He took this path because he saw it as an effective means for placing the caliphate on a secure foundation that the long history of 'Alid antagonisms and grievances had contributed much to undermining. Given his bitter personal experience of having come close to being removed by al-Amîn prior to the Civil War, the anti-caliphate of Ibrâhîm b. al-Mahdî, the loss of a good part of the empire to the Aghlabids and Idrîsids (not to mention the Tâhirids for whom the caliph had become little more than a nominal leader), the ever-present menace of the Byzantine empire, and a great number of uprisings in various regions of the Islamic empire, it is reasonable to assume that al-Ma'mûn was especially sensitive to the hazards of a vulnerable caliphal institution and the fate of a caliph who was not in full and firm command. Having failed to do away with the uncertainties to himself and posterity through such measures as his aborted attempt to bring the 'Alids into the mainstream, al-Ma'mûn took another path, the *miḥna*. Through the *miḥna* he sought to restore to the person of the caliph that measure of all-encompassing authority which the institution had allegedly lost but which, in the earlier days of Islam, gave the caliph maximal leverage. He probably saw no other option; that this was the case is indicated in the caliph's last will and testament where he asked his successor, al-Mu'taṣim, to "follow your brother's line regarding the Koran"[6] even though the information which al-Ma'mûn received just before he died did not suggest that it was to be an easy task.

Coupled with the arguments presented in Chapter Four on the untenability of explaining the *miḥna* solely by Mu'tazilism or Shi'ism, these considerations suggest the greater explanatory power of Proposition III which links the *miḥna* to al-Ma'mûn's concern with the caliphate. Stated in the form of a thesis, this alternative reads as follows:

> Al-Ma'mûn ordered the *miḥna* for no other reason than to safeguard the caliphal institution whose head he envisaged as having the birthright, indeed, duty, to exercise an authority in spiritual matters that was as supreme, undisputed and universally acknowledged as the authority he was exercising as the Community's secular leader.

It will become evident in the course of this chapter that al-Ma'mûn's vision of the caliphate was manifest in various texts written by or for him over a long stretch of time. His vision, a coherent and consistent one, was born many years before the *miḥna*. It is probably due to the drama attending the *miḥna* decree and the mechanism of its implementation that this early vision of the caliph and its implications have tended to be overlooked. Al-Ma'mûn's vision of the caliphate is very much in evidence as far back as 198/813-4 just a few years after he had assumed the caliphal office. Having said this, it should be pointed out further that al-Ma'mûn's vision of the caliphate did not differ much from that of his predecessors. Indeed, it is argued in this chapter that al-Ma'mûn was actually attempting to *restore* to the leader of the Islamic Community a position which he assumed previous caliphs had enjoyed – a view which fits well with the overall interpretation given by Crone and Hinds (1986) of the development of the caliphal institution.

As al-Ma'mûn saw it, the caliphal institution protected Islam as a religion and a community, and its weakening was bound to adversely affect the destiny of "God's religion". In comparison with what could be at stake, a *miḥna* would be justified even though such a measure was drastic. A milder course, such as the issuance of a decree in which the caliph would simply assert that, henceforth, he was the fountainhead of all authority on all matters of concern to his subjects would not do. After all, his designation of al-Riḍâ was by a decree – one that was solemnly signed by the two parties involved, witnessed by others and formally sealed by pledges of allegiance – yet, it only resulted in stirring up opposition to the caliph. This time words alone would not suffice; they had to be backed by resolute action, and the steps had to be planned with thorough care. The caliph identified potential opponents beforehand, and he cast the issue of the createdness of the Koran in the form of a challenge over which a route for escape was scarcely possible.

The potential opponents were the emerging class of learned men (*'ulamâ'*), i.e., the experts in law (*fuqahâ'*), judges, and traditionists (*muḥaddiṯûn*), who had by this time carved for themselves a territory of their own and exerted such influence and power on the public as to make the caliph look irrelevant when it came to matters of faith. These men had to be forced to come to terms, at pains of death if need be, with the view presented by al-Ma'mûn that it was the caliph, not they, who was the highest spiritual authority of the land. After all, as al-Ma'mûn argued in the *miḥna* letters, the caliph was the sole recipient of special gifts from God and only he was qualified to know how to save the souls of Muslims.

5.2. Al-Ma'mûn's vision of the caliphal institution and the place of the caliph in it

Al-Ma'mûn's vision comprises: the caliph's place within the domain of God and the Prophet; his duties to these higher powers; and both his obligations to the Islamic Community and the nature of authority he has over it. The information gathered from the primary sources on this vision will be presented under the headings of the relation to God and the Prophet, and the caliph as custodian.

5.2.1. Al-Ma'mûn and the domain of God and the Prophet Muḥammad

On three separate occasions during his reign, the caliph referred to himself as the deputy or representative of God (*khalîfat Allâh*). The first of these was in 201/817, the year in which he designated al-Riḍâ as heir.[7] The second was probably shortly after the year 202/817-8, in the context of a letter the caliph wrote to al-Ḥasan b. Sahl.[8] The third was in the *miḥna* order[9] in 218/833.[10] The caliph was not only the representative of God but of the Prophet as well; reference to himself as the successor of his forefather, Muḥammad, was made around 210/825-6.[11] And in his *miḥna* order the caliph went so far as to describe himself as the inheritor of the prophethood.[12]

Al-Ma'mûn also claimed for himself a unique relationship with God. In the letter mentioned above which was written to al-Ḥasan b. Sahl, the caliph stated that God had inspired to him His views, zeal and intent.[13] Roughly around the same time albeit in a different context, the caliph stated that the choice of 'Alî b. Mûsâ as heir was inspired by God.[14] And, finally, in the year 218/833, al-Ma'mûn wrote in his first letter on the *miḥna* that God had entrusted him with special and hidden knowledge (as well as political power).[15] He further made the claim that he, unlike others, was able to recognize God as He really is (*ḥaqq qadrihi*).[16]

Al-Ma'mûn's perception of himself as the *khalîfa* of both God and the Prophet fits well with a conceptualization he made, quite early in his reign, wherein the caliphal institution was projected as one that was wrought by God.[17] Having directly linked his person as well as the institution of which he was the head to God and the Prophet, it should come as no surprise that al-Ma'mûn saw himself as the bulwark of Islam and its protector.[18] Despite projecting the caliphal institution as being intrinsically linked to God and to the Prophet by ways which transcended human agency, the merits of the holder of the caliphal office were also stressed as we see in both al-Ma'mûn's statement that his brother, al-Amîn, did not merit the office[19] and in the designation of al-Riḍâ.[20]

5.2.2. The caliph as custodian

The caliph spelled out his duties to both those higher than himself (God and the Prophet) and to his subjects, on the one hand, and the authority he had over the Community, on the other.

The caliph was assigned by God as guardian of His religion and laws,[21] it was his duty to combat the unbelievers, protect the unity of the state, stem the tide of civil discord, maintain public order and security and ensure access to the Holy Places.[22] Accountable to God for his actions,[23] the caliph served as the executor of His ordinances[24] and of the Prophet's commands.[25]

In his conduct, the caliph must follow the path of the Prophet[26] and serve as a model of good behavior to his subjects.[27] He must direct his behavior at acquiring God's favor while fearing His punishment.[28] Fearing God and obeying Him is a theme that recurred throughout al-Ma'mûn's reign.[29]

The caliph must place the well-being of his subjects above his personal inclinations[30] and he must be guided by the principle of justice.[31] Treating the subjects with gentleness[32] and taking away from the strong to give to the weak[33] were among the caliph's recommendations to his brother who was to succeed him.

The subjects' duty to obey their caliph was a theme the caliph repeatedly stressed.[34] He also spoke of a wide range of authority over them, to which he was entitled. In his *miḥna* order, for example, al-Ma'mûn saw the use of the sword as justified for securing compliance with his wishes[35] and he considered it within his jurisdiction to determine who was and who was not entitled to transmit *ḥadîth*.[36] A report dating back to 201/816-7, recorded by al-Djahshiyârî,[37] has al-Ma'mûn first overruling a judge and then summarily dismissing him because the verdict he pronounced happened to disfavor the caliph's vizier, al-Fadl b. Sahl.

Claiming for the caliph a superiority of knowing what is best for the Community, al-Ma'mûn posed as an educator[38] – a role he also assumed as far back as 198/813-4 as enshrined in the *risâlat al-khamîs*.[39] His aim as an educator was to save the souls of his subjects by ensuring that they tread the right path he defined for them.[40]

Al-Ma'mûn's conception of the caliphate may be summarized as follows. The caliph has links to God and the Prophet and is the representative of both on earth. This unique bond bestows special authority and enjoins the fulfillment of duties which includes guardianship of Islam and leadership of the Community both secularly and spiritually. This conception dates back to about 198/813-4 and did not change over time. It was, however, only at the end of his reign that al-Ma'mûn took concrete measures to ensure that his vision became a reality.

5.3. The miḥna order and the issues dealt with in the letters

The caliph ordered the *miḥna* while he was sojourning near Tarsus where he was either engaged in or planning a military campaign against the Byzantine empire.[41] The order was conveyed to his governor in Baghdad, Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm, in a series of five letters written in the last four months of the caliph's life, and of which only the first bears a date – Rabî' I of the year 218/March-April, 833.[42]

In the first of these letters al-Ma'mûn gave an indication of the groups to be interrogated and, in later letters, he specified the names of particular individuals to be tested by Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm in Baghdad and the names of others whom he wanted dispatched to him for personal interrogation. In the first letter, too, the caliph made plain that he had both the right and duty to order the *miḥna* because, as he put it, ignorance of God's ways was prevalent and the men who were supposed to guide the public had more than failed to do so.[43]

Equating "religious faith" with the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran, the caliph instructed his governor to secure the assent to the doctrine and to keep him informed of the outcome of the proceedings, a task which the governor fulfilled by sending what may have been *verbatim* reports. Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm was further instructed to make public the names of those who assented to the doctrine and to keep an eye on them – presumably to forestall possible retractions or "double talk" – but otherwise to allow them to retain their jobs.

The caliph was fully determined that the *miḥna* be crowned with success. No means were to be spared in pursuance of this goal. The tactics used varied to suit individual cases. Al-Ma'mûn dangled the "carrot" – as in the case of al-Wâsiṭî who was to be told by Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm that he would be permitted to transmit *ḥadîth* if he assented to the doctrine[44] – but far more often he used the "stick approach". The caliph denigrated, embarrassed, blackmailed, cut off means of support and threatened with imprisonment and use of the sword in order to ensure success.

The *miḥna* order does not appear to have been an impulsive act. It was a calculated step. Considering that al-Ma'mûn's first letter is strikingly ambiguous (see below), that he decided to have the first round of the *miḥna* carried out by proxy (his governor Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm), and that he hand-picked a group of seven particular men whom he himself wanted to interrogate, it is safe to assume that the caliph was weighing his moves. The goal of asserting the supreme authority of the caliph in all matters demanded such care.

From this overview we proceed now to a detailed scrutiny of the letters.

5.3.1. A comparison of the miḥna letters

Two of the five *miḥna* letters, the second and the fifth, were quite brief. The second only instructed the governor to dispatch seven men to be interrogated by the caliph in person.[45] The fifth letter[46] said little: in it, Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm was instructed to tell Bishr b. al-Walîd, one of the men interrogated, that he had erred in interpreting a particular Koranic verse; and Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm was asked to dispatch to Tarsus all those already interrogated by the governor, except for Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Muḥammad b. Nûḥ who had been sent to al-Ma'mûn earlier.[47]

The first and the third letters are of approximately the same length (some 660 words each) and are similar in other ways, too. The fourth letter is the longest and its tone and style are at great variance with all others. So much for some general statements about the totality of the letters.

The most striking feature of the first letter is its vagueness. This vagueness is probably intentional, reminiscent of the "trial balloon" which someone floats in order to discover what the best next step might be. The letter is not specific on the rationale for the interrogation, the measures to be taken against those who refuse to acquiesce in the doctrine, or who should be subjected to the *miḥna*. The threat against those who decline to give assent to the doctrine is also tentative and vague: "The Commander of the Faithful is not about to seek the assistance of ... those whose faith is in doubt" (*inna amîr al-mu'minîn ghayr musta'în fî 'amalihi ... bi-man lâ yûthaq bi-dînihi*).[48]

Speaking in generalities, al-Ma'mûn said that he felt it as his solemn duty to correct the wrong views of those who were

> sunk in ignorance and in blindness about God, plunged into error regarding the true nature of His religion and His unity and faith in Him ... people who fall short of being able to grasp the reality of God as He should be recognized ... and to distinguish between Him and His creation[49]

i.e., the Koran. Finally, the bulk of the letter is devoted to damning the self-serving "group of adherents of the false way"[50] and setting forth evidence from the Book which, the caliph said, could only be interpreted to mean that the Koran was finite in time, a created object.

The third letter spells out what was only vaguely stated in the first. Here, instead of the "judges and witnesses"[51] mentioned in the first letter as target for the interrogation, the caliph specifies the names of some and lets us know who the others are by listing the functions they would have to

give up were they to refuse to assent to the doctrine. His threat in the third letter is also more affirmative and definite: "The Commander of the Faithful", al-Ma'mûn says in his third letter,

> does not regard any of them [those who deny the doctrine] suited for holding an office of trust as depositories; authorized legal counsel; witnesses; men whose words or reports are to be construed as reliable; or men to exercise authority over any aspect in the lives of the subjects (*wa lâ yarâ [amîr al-mu'minîn] an yahall ahadan minhum mahall al-thiqa fî amâna wa lâ 'adâla wa lâ shahâda wa lâ sidq fî qawl wa lâ ḥukâya wa lâ tawliya li-shay' min umûr al-ra'iyya*).[52]

The link between the doctrine and "God's unity" is made quite explicit in that, in this letter, unlike the first, nonbelievers in the doctrine are summarily accused of being infidels.[53]

So much for the differences between the first and the third letters. They do, however, share three important features. First, both are heavily loaded with arguments – generally well-reasoned – that are cemented by numerous Koranic verses. Secondly, in contrast to the fourth letter, the two under consideration are more elegant and coherent in style and flow smoothly. The third similarity concerns the detailed setting forth by al-Ma'mûn of the qualities inherent in the occupant of the caliphal office as well as his privileges and duties.

As stated earlier, the style of the fourth letter[54] differs much from that of the first and third. It rests on combative argumentativeness rather than reasoning and, in it, the caliph no longer concerns himself with a dispute over doctrinal issues. To be sure, al-Ma'mûn's confrontational and nonconciliatory stand is very much in evidence in all letters but it is most evident in the fourth. In this letter the issue of the createdness of the Koran is relegated to the background, to be replaced by a boundless determination that dissenters must abide by the ironclad rule that the caliph must be obeyed and his *ex cathedra* pronouncements accepted without any qualification whatsoever.

All in all, the fourth letter reads as though it were not written by the same man who wrote the other letters. Also its style cannot be rhymed with other texts written by (or for) al-Ma'mûn previously.[55] Why the tone of the fourth letter and the shift in its focus have occurred is open to speculation. It is quite possible that al-Ma'mûn was reacting to the messages he received from his governor which would mean that the caliph may have realized he had underestimated the degree of opposition that was now being encountered. This could explain why the caliph's threats became increasingly harsh and specific and why he dispatched

this letter with a special courier[56] – as though he were intent on wrapping up the case with maximal speed and efficiency.

If the caliph was surprised by the recalcitrance being experienced, he had good reason to be: The seven men whom al-Ma'mûn had summoned for personal interrogation (via the second letter) had all, to a man, declared their assent to the doctrine, whereupon they were sent back to Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm with fresh instructions which, significantly, included the "making public" of their assent. Specifically, the governor was asked to "announce publicly ... to a gathering of experts in religious law (*fuqahâ'*) and senior traditionists"[57] what the seven men had said. Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm did so and, probably to make a greater impression, he recalled the seven men and had them repeat in the gathering what they had said to the caliph about the doctrine – which they did.

5.3.2. Timing of the miḥna

The timing of the *miḥna* order is a curious one. We have no knowledge of any special circumstances which may have prompted al-Ma'mûn to order an interrogation so far away from home and at such a time. The caliph's campaign at the time was not his first against the Byzantine empire, and there is nothing in the sources, old or new, to suggest that the issuance of the *miḥna* decree could have contributed to a military victory or that the two events are related in any other way.[58]

The statements to be made presently rest on the assumption – which, having read the primary sources, I now find rather dubious – that the declaration of the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran and the *miḥna* order were indeed separated in time rather than having occurred in the same year as it seems more logical. There is, however, no justification at this point to back my hunch that the two events did in all likelihood take place at the same time against al-Ṭabarî's report that six years had separated them. Be that as it may, it is not unthinkable that al-Ma'mûn's issuance of the *miḥna* order, allegedly in 218/833, was the culmination of a process of some "unfinished business" which he may have started at the eve of his departure to the front. What that unfinished business could have been, if there was any, is unknown. One has to acknowledge that the issuance of the *miḥna* decree in Rabî' I of the year 218/March-April 833, so far away from the capital of the empire and under the prevailing circumstances, remains a mystery. However, viewed from a broader perspective, the issuance of the order does not seem untimely. During the period of Islamic history in which al-Ma'mûn's reign fell, men of learning, the *'ulamâ'*, including the *fuqahâ'*, were gaining popularity and acquiring intellectual fecundity.[59] And it is probably precisely this freedom and expanding influence which al-Ma'mûn wanted to bring to a halt. It is not un-

likely that the caliph felt that, were this trend to continue unchecked, it would eventually lead to a "house divided" rather than one with a single head who commanded decisive and strong authority over all that concerned Muslims, be it secular or sacred. Islam had enemies enough. After all, al-Ma'mûn himself was a witness, indeed a party, to a great *fitna* (the fourth Civil War), the insurrections and rebellions during his tenure were incessant, his own family could not be counted on to support him as the Community's head, his father al-Rashîd had found himself being dispossessed of a good portion of the empire, and the Byzantines were not on the losing side. Possibly, only a return to the time when a caliph allegedly commanded the unquestioned authority in all spheres of life could restore the grip and preeminence of the caliphal institution.

5.3.3. The createdness of the Koran as a convenient device

Al-Ma'mûn publicly declared the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran in 212/827. The scrutiny of the sources does not give us any clue why this particular doctrine was declared, or why it was declared in this particular year rather than, say, the year before or after. The six year interlude between the declaration and the *miḥna* and the exact timing of the *miḥna* discussed in the previous paragraph remain a mystery. According to the thesis presented in this chapter, however, the doctrine was not an end in itself – a view that corresponds with the silence of the sources on this matter – but only a means which the caliph employed for conducting a *miḥna*. Subjecting men to the *miḥna* naturally required an issue over which they were to be tested. The createdness of the Koran doctrine was an eminently suitable issue since it met three important criteria which gave the man who set the rules of the "debate", the caliph, a decided edge. Two of the criteria were the theological nature of the Koran and the manner in which it could be tailored for the test. The third criterion, one that set the doctrine apart from other debatable theological issues, was the difficulty of refuting it. The three criteria of course overlap.

The doctrine of the createdness of the Koran was a theological issue. As such it had the advantage of challenging on their own turf those who claimed for themselves knowledge of, and indeed expertise in, theological matters. It would be inconceivable that the learned men to whom the question about the nature of the Koran was to be put would refuse to give an opinion about a matter so intimately tied to their pretensions. If they were to do that, they would qualify as impostors or as ignoramuses, as the caliph called them, and do damage to their own interests. Further, an outright refusal to give an opinion was likely to be construed by the average man as an act of insubordination to the authority of the caliph – which

even Ahmad b. Hanbal, one of those interrogated, ruled out as impermissible.

A test issue was advantageous to the caliph to the degree that it lent itself to the type of straightforward, cause-effect rhetoric with which the caliph's letters were loaded. The doctrine of the createdness of the Koran met this criterion well.[60] The caliph cast it in the format of a question to which the men interrogated were expected to answer by "agree" or "disagree". There was no room for equivocation since the question was "Is the Koran created?" and answers which did not address this very question directly were brushed aside by asking the same question again and again. This is basically the rule by which the men interrogated were pressed to abide. Refusal to give a direct affirmative answer was also made to look like an ultimate test of a man's fidelity to the Islamic religion *in toto*.[61]

Another criterion which favored the caliph's position was the difficulty of coming up with a rebuttal to the doctrine. Neither on grounds of logic nor on the authority of the Book could the doctrine be refuted within the framework of the structure imposed. In essence, the caliph argued in his letters syllogistically: God created all things; the Koran is a thing; therefore, the Koran was created.[62] What could the opponents say? Responding to al-Ma'mûn's insistence that "God made the Koran" (*dja'ala al-qur'ân*)[63] meant nothing other than "God created the Koran", the best that anyone could come up with was a denial of the equivalence of *khalaqa* (to create) and *dja'ala* (to make) but they could not or would not say what else "*dja'ala*" could possibly mean.

The men interrogated were in a tight squeeze indeed. Some of them simply acquiesced in the doctrine. A second group took cover under *taqiyya* (= caution: insincere compliance with a demand under duress).[64] A third group, soothing at once their own conscience and appeasing the caliph, gave an implied consent by saying that if the Commander of the Faithful wanted them to say that the Koran was created, then "*al-sam' wa al-ṭâ'a*":[65] to hear is to obey (the caliph's command).

It could not have been lost on a man of al-Ma'mûn's intelligence that members of the last two groups mentioned above were circumventing the issue and fell short of giving the wholehearted answer demanded. This was of little consequence, however, since the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran as such was a pseudo issue. Indeed, counterfeit acquiescence of those who sheltered themselves under *taqiyya* and especially "hearing is obeying" was probably of greater service to the caliph than a genuine consent, since the message of feigned consent went a longer way in legitimizing the caliph's own claims as the arbiter on spiritual matters. No wonder that al-Ma'mûn wanted to lose no time in making public the

names of those who were considered to have passed the test. On basis of the above —though of course we will never be able to tell what exactly went through the caliph's mind— it would be reasonable to surmise that al-Ma'mûn's goal was to tame and subjugate men, not to set them straight on doctrinal problems. The point at issue was not a particular theological doctrine but the authority of the caliph versus the authority of those men who saw themselves —not the caliph— as the legitimate repository of religious knowledge and heritage and the authentic transmitters of such a knowledge.[66]

5.3.4. The miḥna letters as polarity of good against evil

Al-Ma'mûn sought to create between himself, high above, and the rest of the Community at the other end of the divide, an unbridgeable gulf. Especially in the preambles to the first and third letters on the *miḥna*, he set himself far apart and in a very forceful manner, as the supreme head of the Islamic Community to whose will all others must bow.

In order to maximize the distance between the ruler and the ruled, al-Ma'mûn projected the caliph as the paragon of wisdom, virtue and knowledge, the man whose position as caliph was deeply rooted in no less than the realm of God and the Prophet. Let us elaborate, first, on how the caliph saw "*safalat al-'âmma*" (base elements) and the evil ones, then turn to the other pole of the dichotomy, the caliph and his status.

5.3.4.1. Safalat al-'âmma and the evil-doers

> The Commander of the faithful has realized that the broad mass of the people, and the overwhelming majority of the base elements and lower strata of society (*al-sawâd al-akbar min hashw*[67] *al-ra'iyya wa safalat al-'âmma*) are those who —in all the regions and far horizons of the world— are ... sunk in ignorance ... and have no foresight or vision or faculty of reasoning.[68]

From this summary judgment —which is the only thing al-Ma'mûn had to say in all his letters about the masses— the caliph immediately directed his bombardment of abuse against the people "of the false way" who "deliberately lead astray" the masses and who were even "more deeply sunk in ignorance and blindness" than they.[69] The caliph's boundless contempt for the men he sought to subjugate through the interrogation is in abundant evidence in all his letters. They were called liars, evil, thieves, of corrupt honor, usurers, deceitful, stupid and worse.

As one scrutinizes the letters in succession, there emerge two noticeable shifts in the nature of the caliph's attack, reaching its highest point in the fourth letter. One such shift transforms the men from opponents of a doctrine to opponents of the religion of Islam in its entirety. The other

shift portrays opponents as renegades who were hurling defiance at the person of their caliph.

Initially, al-Ma'mûn took issue with nonagreement over the createdness of the Koran doctrine, adducing reasoned evidence that such a stand violated logic and Scripture. Having failed to get the opponents "to see the light", al-Ma'mûn started to hurl accusations and issue open threats. Opponents were accused of "polytheism"[70] and "anthropomorphism",[71] and he likened them to "Christians who say of Jesus, the son of Mary, that he was not created because he is the Word of God."[72] He saw the resistance as outright enmity to Islam. By refusing to acknowledge that the Koran was created, the men involved were taken to have perverted the Koranic texts and committed a "heresy" (*ilḥâd*),[73] thereby playing into the hands of the enemy of Islam (*sahhalû al-sabîl li-'aduww al-islâm wa i'tarafû bi-al-tabdîl wa al-ilḥâd*).[74] The "utterances [of these men that the Koran is not created] ... have enlarged the breach in their religion and the defect in their trustworthiness".[75] Not only were they of "depraved nature ... and vessels of ignorance" but they were the "tongue of *iblîs*" (the devil) as well.[76] These men "have forsaken the divine truth for their own delusions and have adopted for themselves a supporter for their error to the exclusion of God" (*fa-tarakû al-ḥaqq ilâ bâṭilihim wa ittakhadhû dûn Allâh walîdjatan ilâ ḍalâlatihim*).[77]

The theme of obedience to the caliph is one which underlies the second shift in the letters. Whereas in the earlier communications, the caliph voiced his expectation that the men subjected to the interrogation would be able to see their way to the truth of the doctrine, his fourth letter speaks of the expectation that these men must "fully concur with the views of the Commander of the Faithful"[78] that the Koran was of God's creation. Obedience, it may be recalled, was the only demand al-Ma'mûn said his subjects were beholden to. Refusal to give assent to the doctrine was interpreted by him as disobedience and a violation of the hierarchical relationship between the ruler and the ruled – not a disagreement on a particular issue as such. The disobedience constituted such an insult and direct defiance to the caliphal institution and to the man assigned by God to set up and guard His religion, as to fully justify the sword which al-Ma'mûn threatened he would use. If the *miḥna* had this purpose – which I think it did – of asserting the caliph's all-encompassing authority, al-Ma'mûn's threat to use the sword is perfectly understandable.

5.3.4.2. The caliph as embodiment of virtue and illumination

"God made it incumbent upon the imams and caliphs of the Muslims" al-Ma'mûn said in the first letter,

> that they should be zealous in establishing God's religion, which He has asked them to guard faithfully; in the heritage of prophethood of which He has made them inheritors in the tradition of knowledge which He has entrusted to their keeping; in acting justly with the government of their subjects; and in being diligent in obeying God's will in their conduct towards those subjects. Now the Commander of the Faithful asks God to direct him to firmness and resolution ... in the exercise of authority over his people which God, with His compassion and grace, has entrusted to him.[79]

The third letter expands on the role of the caliph but goes further. Here al-Ma'mûn stressed the special knowledge which God inspired in the caliphs and which made them uniquely qualified to be the Community's guides and educators —a theme already in evidence as far back as 198/813-4, the year in which the *risâlat al-khamîs* is believed to have been composed. Additionally, the caliph posed as educator not only to the average man but also —and significantly— to those who "... lead an ascetic life ... thereby acquiring for themselves glory ... and securing for themselves leadership".[80]

The preamble to the third letter reads as follows and speaks for itself.

> That which God has a right to expect from His representatives on earth and from those entrusted by Him with authority over His servants, upon whom He has been pleased to lay the setting up of His religion and upon whom He has laid the burden of caring for His creatures, the putting into effect of His ordinances and His laws, and the conscious imitation of His justice among His creatures, is that they should exert themselves earnestly for God; render Him sincere service in that which He has asked them to keep safe and has laid upon them, make Him known through that excellence of learning which He has entrusted to them and the knowledge which He has placed within them; guide back to Him the one who has turned aside from Him and bring back the one who has turned his back from His command; trace out for their subjects the way of salvation for them; draw their attention to the limits of their faith and the way to their heavenly success and protection from sin; and reveal to them those of their affairs which are hidden from them and those which are dubious and obscure ... [God also claims from them as of right] that they should bring this about by guiding the subjects aright and giving them clear vision...[81]

Whether or not al-Ma'mûn genuinely believed that God inspired him to truth and that his actions were purely in the service of God and the

Prophet does not matter even if we would be able to answer this question. What matters is that the men subjected to the interrogation and who were trying to secure "for themselves leadership"[82] heard it and must bow to a man who said that he had the mission to uphold God's will and religion. The identity of the men who were endeavoring to assume "leadership" was not made explicit. It is clear, however, both from the text of the various letters and al-Ma'mûn's actions, that the reference was to the men who were arrogating to themselves a role that he saw as the caliph's birthright. Endowed with special knowledge that was inaccessible to such pretenders and committed to steering his subjects on to the path of salvation, it was logical for al-Ma'mûn to give the *miḥna* a strong religious rationale – hence the createdness of the Koran doctrine which he made to look as the ultimate test of fidelity to Islam. The message was made clear in no uncertain terms that it was he, and he alone, who had the credentials for "executing God's ordinances" and settling questions of spiritual concern in the very same way he was running the secular affairs of the state. Having said this, al-Ma'mûn appears to have been aiming at no less than a complete restoration of that conception of the caliphate which embodied unquestioned supremacy on all matters, sacred and secular, allegedly at the time of his kinsman, Muḥammad, the Orthodox Caliphs and, according to Crone and Hinds (1986), the Umayyads as well.[83]

5.3.5. Identity and characteristics of the men subjected to the miḥna

The men interrogated on order of al-Ma'mûn are classifiable in two major groups. One group, undoubtedly the larger of the two, consisted of the unnamed ones about whom we cannot say much but who should not be ignored. The second group comprises those whom chroniclers identified by name and who, because they are known, were the beneficiaries of the exclusive attention of researchers. We deal with the former group first.

5.3.5.1. The unnamed men: "judges and shuhûd"

As is evident from the caliph's explicit instruction in both the first and third letters, practically all the men he wanted interrogated, but whose individual names were almost never revealed, were the two constituents of the judiciary: the judges and their functionaries who were trained in law, the *shuhûd* (plural of *shâhid*).[84] With regard to the first of these two considerable groups, Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm was ordered to interrogate the *qâḍî*s under his own governorship including the only two whose names were singularly specified in the third letter, Dja'far b. 'Îsâ and 'Abd al-Raḥmân b. Isḥâq whom I was able to identify. During the tenure of al-Ma'mûn, Dja'far b. 'Îsâ and 'Abd al-Raḥmân b. Isḥâq held two judgeships of

Baghdad, the one over its eastern sector, the other over its part west of the river; they probably held the same position at the time of the *miḥna* (see below where these two men are added to the list of identified individuals). This means that, to start with, the caliph methodically wanted to secure the consent of Baghdad. The instructions to Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm were that once the judges interrogated had given their consent, they, in turn, were to test all those under their jurisdiction.[85] In a subsequent letter, namely the fourth, al-Ma'mûn issued fresh instructions which appear to broaden the reach of the interrogation. Here the caliph asked his governor to test the "judges in the outlying parts of the areas of" Isḥâq's "administrative jurisdiction".[86] Also in this letter, Isḥâq was further instructed to order those judges who proclaimed their assent to the doctrine to, yet again in turn, test those under them. Specifically, the judges were to interrogate "those who are in their courts for purposes of giving evidence about the claimant's rights",[87] meaning the *shuhûd*.

We do not know of how many judges and *shuhûd* the group of unnamed men consisted. Their number must, however, have been considerable especially since a *qâḍî* was not restricted to the services of one *shâhid* – as may be surmised from al-Ma'mûn's letters. At any rate, their number must have greatly exceeded that of the men whose names are known. From here on in this paragraph the attention will be focused on the latter group. There will be occasion, however, for inquiring why the caliph had singled out the *qâḍî*s and *shuhûd* for interrogation (see 5.3.5.3)

5.3.5.2. In search of denominators common to the men whose names are known

In so far as specific names are mentioned in the sources, a total of 44 men were interrogated. Except for al-Ḥârith b. al-Miskîn[88], the names of all the others were given by al-Ṭabarî.

Is there anything that sets these men as a whole, or a significant segment of them, apart from the rest of the Islamic Community? Did they share any characteristics and, if so, were they any different from their peers? In order to throw light on these questions, information was gathered about the identity, background and affiliations of each of these men. The information appears in the last column of the table in Appendix Two. The table also identifies the men involved in the successive rounds of the *miḥna* as mirrored in the sequence of al-Ma'mûn's letters to his governors. I have also tabulated separately the names of the men who have acquiesced in the doctrine, those who refused to give assent in the first round, those who steadfastly refused to do so in a repeated round, and, finally, those who, at one time or another, were dispatched to the caliph at Tarsus. Listed separately, too, are the men who gave assent but who,

for some reason which remains obscure, were nonetheless sent to Tarsus on orders of the caliph.

Unfortunately, the information available on most men is very sketchy and on quite a few it is missing altogether. It was impossible to gain any information about a quarter of the total and what is set forth in the biographical summaries of a few others is at best a rough approximation since it is not absolutely certain that these were indeed the right men.

Everyone interrogated was a man of some learning. It goes without saying that al-Ma'mûn had heard of each of them and, judging by the text of his letters, he knew most if not all of them in person. The evaluations and (embarrassing) comments —with their varied and intimate details— which al-Ma'mûn made about some twenty men indicate two things. First, the caliph must have known a great deal about these men; and, second, they must have been prominent enough to evoke the caliph's interest in keeping track of their doings and alleged machinations.

There is no particular pattern to the geographic distribution of the 44 men. On the basis of the information available, it would seem that seven men were from Baghdad and four or five from Khurasan (notably Marw). We have far more information about the professional identity and outlooks of the men. The largest group —nineteen or twenty— consists of *muḥaddiṯûn* and there were three men who were both *muḥaddiṯûn* and judges, while two others could be identified as *muḥaddiṯûn* and *fuqahâ'*. The 40-plus group included six judges of whom two were labeled *fuqahâ'* as well. Two men were designated as "*min ahl al-sunna*"; one as a "*mutakallim*"; three of the Ḥanafite persuasion, and one other, who was described as "*min ahl al-ra'y*", may be taken as a *faqîh* or added to the three Ḥanafites.

All in all, the 44 men interrogated were quite heterogeneous in terms of their callings, geographic origins and residential locations.[89] However, the information available allows us to draw two conclusions. The first is an obvious one, namely that they all must have possessed eminence and learning to such a degree that it brought them into the purview of the supreme head of the Islamic Community. The second conclusion is that the two largest groups within these 44 men, the traditionists and the judiciary, do have in common a career that rests on what may be termed the codified life of the Prophet. These two groups share a religious dimension stemming from the fact that the *muḥaddiṯûn* deal with the transmission of the traditions of the Prophet and those associated with him, and the judiciary's entire career line was often interwoven with the *ḥadîṯ* and how these were interpreted and applied.

As a group within the 44 men, the *muḥaddiṯûn* were the largest, followed in terms of size by the judiciary. Viewed, however, from the per-

spective of all the named and unnamed men who were subjected to the *miḥna* under al-Ma'mûn, the *muḥaddiṯûn* are the smaller of the two. Judging by the qualifications I found, such as "famous" or "reliable" *muḥaddiṯ*, as well as by the caliber and length of the lists of men who taught or studied under the *muḥaddiṯûn* in our sample, nearly everyone was a *muḥaddiṯ* of distinction.

That it was the caliph's intent to target the interrogation on both the *muḥaddiṯûn* and members of the legal profession is evident in the second letter even though the first (and third) spoke only of *qâḍî*s and *šuhûd*. As may be recalled, the caliph's second letter ordered the summoning of seven men to Tarsus. We have information on six of the seven men and five of them were *muḥaddiṯûn*; one was a *muḥaddiṯ*/judge and a second a *muḥaddiṯ*/*faqîh*. Perhaps taking his cue from this, Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm went beyond the caliph's explicit instructions in the first and third letters by including *muḥaddiṯûn* among the first group of men he had interrogated (column B of the table) – a step to which the caliph did not object as reflected, among other things, in his criticism of the various men listed in column E.

The conclusion is that the men who were subjected to the *miḥna* were unalike in background as a unitary group but that most of them did belong to the judiciary and the *muḥaddiṯûn*, whose assent to a doctrine was demanded at the outset but whose obedience to the Commander of the Faithful became focal as they persisted in refusing to acquiesce.

5.3.5.3. The judiciary and traditionists as target

Ever since the first Muslim judge (*qâḍî*, *ḥâkim*) was appointed at the dawn of Islam,[90] judges had become an indispensable fixture and power base for the administration of justice, fending for the weak (e.g., orphans), supervising the operation of *waqf* (pious foundations), and in other ways for the maintenance of the social order. As time went by and the Islamic Community grew, the number of judges multiplied.[91] Concurrent with this expansion, the teachings of the various incipient schools of jurisprudence spread[92] and the number of *fuqahâ'* who elaborated on them increased as well as the sum of litigations in a society that was undergoing rapid change and becoming multi-ethnic. Already before al-Ma'mûn's time, the *qâḍî*s had become a distinct group with wide ranging influence and developing bureaucracies.

One important element of these "bureaucracies" comprised the "*šuhûd*". These had come into existence about 100 years before al-Ma'mûn's era and slowly but surely became a separate professional group. This group was generally made up of young notaries who were appointed and dismissed by the judge in whose court they worked and who busied them-

selves drawing up contracts or otherwise handling the "court cases" assigned to them by their superior. As an extension of the *qâḍî*'s arm, the *shuhûd*, too, became an ever-present influence in the maintenance of social order. After all, the totality of the prevailing laws in the hands of the judges and *shuhûd* stemmed from (or, if "imported" were adapted to) the *sharî'a*. Juynboll (1983, 89) informs us that the *qâḍî*s of Baghdad "more so than anywhere else, are identified with transmitting traditions." As a consequence, the judiciary came to acquire an aura of divine legitimacy alongside the secular power it had over the lives of a large segment of the population. Not only were many people subject to the *qâḍî*s and their functionaries but the caliph himself increasingly lost territory to the now near-autonomous judiciary – a trend that he wanted to reverse since it ran counter to his vision of himself as supreme head of the Community.

The *muḥaddithûn* gave continuance to the knowledge about the ways of the Prophet, his Companions and the other founders of Islam. As such, they had their own legitimate claim to a special link with religion and the Messenger to whom the faith was revealed. That this placed them in a position of prestige and influence cannot be doubted. And, like the judiciary, their number was multiplying – in all likelihood at a higher rate since the avocation of transmitting *ḥadîth* was free-lance, a "calling", not a function to which a man, such as a *qâḍî*, had to be appointed. It should also be pointed out that at the time of al-Ma'mûn the boundary between *ḥadîth* and *fiqh* was not yet distinct.[93]

There is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that al-Ma'mûn was opposed to the *muḥaddithûn* as mere collectors. He was opposed to their growing influence and power as a group within Islamic society.[94] Succinctly stated, the caliph sensed his position as "guardian of Islam" and inheritor of the "heritage of prophethood" was in danger, due to the expanding number and influence of *muḥaddithûn* and their groupings who made themselves heard.[95] To forestall such an eventuality, the caliph considered it fit to stem the tide by subjecting the *muḥaddithûn* to a *miḥna* which would weed out undesirable elements. This view finds some confirmation from the caliph's own statements in the letters.

On at least two separate occasions, al-Ma'mûn let it be known that he intended to screen the *muḥaddithûn*, taking it for granted that he had the authority to do so. Acknowledging receipt of a message from Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm, the caliph wrote:

> [You also mention] your giving orders to those of them who would not profess that the Qur'ân was created to refrain from transmitting traditions ... whether in private or in public.[96]

5.3.5.4. Are there other patterns?

Patterns were sought in the biographies of the 44 men within the table's columns (Appendix Two). This scrutiny was followed by comparing various groupings, where appropriate (e.g., columns B and C, which respectfully list those interrogated *en masse* versus individually). Inspected, too, were the biographies of, among others, the men who never gave their assent (column G) and those who were singled out for personal attack by the caliph (E). Apart from what will be noted below, no patterns emerged. The absence of patterns may simply affirm what has been suggested earlier, namely that beyond the intent to subdue the mouthpiece of the codified ways of Islam (judiciary and *muḥaddiṯûn*) the caliph had no other factions in mind like for instance the military. Alternatively, the uncovering of patterns may have been precluded by the size of the groupings in general and in some of the columns in particular.

Yet for two reasons the group of seven men listed in column A of the table is intriguing. First, its exclusivity provides further support for the view that, though the caliph did not say so explicitly as far as the letters which have survived tell us, he did indeed have especially the traditionists rather than the judiciary in mind as a target for the interrogation. On six of the seven men biographical information was found. They were either very prominent themselves or were associated with very prominent men. Discounting Ismâ'îl b. Dâwûd who could not be traced at all, the group includes four traditionists besides Ibn Sa'd who was also a judge. Whether or not it was a mere coincidence that al-Ma'mûn ordered his governor to tackle a group with a greater representation of the judiciary while at the same time he himself took on a group that predominantly consisted of *muḥaddiṯûn* is a question that I can only raise.

Secondly, the caliph's singling out of these men tends to validate the presumption made in an earlier paragraph that al-Ma'mûn proceeded with the *miḥna* methodically and planfully, using the group of seven men as a means of testing the water before taking the dive. There are several indications of this.

To start with, it is probably no accident that, to a man, the entire group of seven gave assent to the doctrine. Of the 44 men of whom the seven were a part, 12 persisted in their opposition (see column G) in defiance of threats that were ominous indeed. Judging by the fact that the caliph knew the seven men in person, since he asked for them by name, knowing a good deal about the intimate lives of the majority of those interrogated and that he had had previous discussions on theological issues with some as his letters reveal, it is probably safe to assume that al-Ma'mûn knew beforehand that the seven men would express their assent to the doctrine.

While six of the men did not seem to have any special qualities to set them apart from the others subjected to the *miḥna*, one of al-Ma'mûn's select group of seven stands out above any of the 43 other men at the time – probably including Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. The man in question is Yaḥyâ b. Ma'în, a famous *riḏâl*-expert, i.e., specialized in knowledge about those who transmitted *ḥadîṯ*. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, who along with two members of his family transmitted from Ibn Ma'în, said of him: if Yaḥyâ b. Ma'în did not know of a particular *ḥadîṯ*, it is, then, not a *ḥadîṯ*.[97] The information I was able to gather tells us also that he had contacts of one sort or another with eight of the men interrogated – a network which exceeds that of any other man with the possible exception of Ibn Ḥanbal. This network includes two (Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Qawârîrî) of the four men who were interrogated in fetters after the initial round, implying that their assent to the doctrine was considered especially important.

It is tempting to conclude from all this that the caliph's choice of the seven men, of whom six were "typical" and one (Yaḥyâ b. Ma'în) was a towering figure, was designed as bait. The assent of the group, probably already a foregone conclusion on the part of al-Ma'mûn, would lead others to follow suit and render the *miḥna* an open and shut case. That the caliph sought to use the group of seven as a "model" which he thought others would emulate is supported by a message he sent to his governor in which he asked him to put the seven men on display. Al-Ṭabarî wrote: after

> they all replied ... that the Qur'ân was created ... [al-Ma'mûn] dispatched them to the City of Peace [i.e., Baghdad], and Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm summoned them together at his house. He announced *publicly* their opinion and their judgement to a gathering of *experts in the religious law* (fuqahâ') *and senior traditionists*, and they affirmed exactly what the seven persons had replied to al-Ma'mûn. So Isḥâq let them go. What Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm did in this matter was by the command of al-Ma'mûn[98] [emphasis mine].

The paragraph just concluded may be summarized as follows. Most of the men subjected to the *miḥna* fall into two major groups, the judiciary and the traditionists – in this order of size. These two groups were influential in society, the first usually by their vocation (revolving around the *šarî'a* which was being developed to its fullest and the administration of its laws) and the *muḥaddiṯûn* by their pursuit as upholders of the knowledge about the ways of the Prophet and those close to him, a body of knowledge which at the time was on its way to being canonized. Al-Ma'mûn had no quarrel with the men he subjected to the *miḥna* as such, and he let free and unharmed anyone who proclaimed submission to his will. What the caliph was seeking was the restoration of the spiritual

authority which the founders of Islam had allegedly had but which, it so happened, was starting to fall to the groups whose representatives he wanted to subdue. The caliph used the judiciary and *muḥaddiṯhûn* as a means for achieving this end just like he used a group of seven hand-picked men whom he probably knew would submit without resistance as a means of prompting the rest to do the same.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Summary

In 212/827 the seventh 'Abbâsid caliph 'Abdallâh al-Ma'mûn declared publicly that the Koran was created. Six years later, he ordered what came to be known as the *miḥna*, a sort of inquisition, to force compliance with this view. The caliph's actions have puzzled modern scholars for two main reasons. First, a declaration of a doctrine within the sphere of religion especially when backed by measures to enforce it on the Community was a novelty to Islam. Second, such actions are not congruent with the image we have of al-Ma'mûn as an accessible man who glorified the intellect and advocated the supremacy of reason as arbiter of truth.

Several interpretations of the caliph's actions have emerged over the years. The following three are the ones most widely accepted but not without reservations since even their own proponents are less than certain of their explanatory power singly or in combinations. The caliph's actions are explained through (1) his Mu'tazilite affinities; (2) his 'Alid/Shi'ite leanings; and, (3) his perception of the caliphal authority.

This study aimed at a reexamination of these explanations in light of three strategies or points of departure. The three strategies are: (a) treating the declaration of the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran as an issue in its own right, separate from the *miḥna* order; (b) focusing sharply on the particular motives which may have prompted the caliph, first, to declare the doctrine, and then, to order the *miḥna*; (c) using as wide and extensive a range of primary Arabic sources —72 in all— as possible.

The result of this investigation permitted the following conclusions.

Conclusions

(1) The first explanation (called in this study Proposition I) attributes the issuance of the doctrine and the *miḥna* to al-Ma'mûn's affinities with the Mu'tazilites and their views. There is evidence that al-Ma'mûn was indeed close to a number of Mu'tazilites. However, he was also close to both non-Mu'tazilites and anti-Mu'tazilites. And the very little that is known about the caliph's theological position does not indicate that he qualifies as a Mu'tazilite. Moreover, the idea that the Koran was created was not at the time an exclusively Mu'tazilite doctrine. The foregoing does not rule out the possibility that Mu'tazilite influences may have con-

tributed in some way to the caliph's declaration or the *miḥna*, but there are no grounds for construing such influences, if any, as the main motivational force or otherwise linking them causally to his actions.

(2) The second explanation (Proposition II) is predicated on an assumed affinity the caliph had with the Shi'ites and which would account for his actions. It is true that the views of the Shi'ites and the caliph did converge on a number of issues, notably the attributes of the *imâm*. Such confluence is not at all strange. After all, Shi'ism, amorphous though it then was (see conclusion 3), was a widely-spread movement-in-process with numerous ideas. That especially those ideas which were in harmony with al-Ma'mûn's concerns as the Community's leader would have an impact is to be expected. Here again, however, a direct motivational link between the caliph's actions and any affinities to Shi'ite ideologies is nowhere to be found, and I also failed to detect a line connecting Shi'ism to either the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran or the *miḥna*.

(3) Proposition III emerged as the most viable of the three explanations. The proposition states that al-Ma'mûn's actions were prompted by his determination to affirm that the holder of the caliphal office was just as entitled to be the uncontested and universally acknowledged authority on *religious* matters as he was the Community's supreme leader in *secular* affairs. A scrutiny of the totality of a series of texts brought together for the first time in this study, reveals that al-Ma'mûn held this view with impressive consistency throughout his reign.

From the perspective of al-Ma'mûn, it was probably a welcome coincidence that the Shi'ites at the time had a notion of the "*imâm*" that was congruent with his own definition of the "caliph". It was probably also a felicitous convenience for him to be able to pick for use a doctrine (the createdness of the Koran) that was debated in Mu'tazilite and other circles. The conception, however, was a fully "Ma'mûnite" one in the sense that it combined what he perhaps thought was an echo from the past when the Prophet and his successors allegedly did personify Islam in all its facets, with currents from the contemporaneous scene in which many ideas were in a state of ferment and the decline in the fortunes of the empire had to be arrested.

Expression of this Ma'mûnite conception of the caliphate is evident in the very fabric of the *miḥna*, in the caliph's singling out of the *'ulamâ'* as its target, in the use to which he put the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran, and in that distinct partiality he had to the 'Alids which has always intrigued scholars. These issues will be taken up one at a time. Before we do so, however, the point needs to be made that no account of these issues can be free from speculation; the limited range of solid facts available to scholars leaves no alternative, and I follow suit but with the conviction that

my version is straightforward, internally consistent and accommodates the four phenomena just named within the framework of Proposition III.

Miḥna. The goal of the *miḥna* was not the enforcement of a particular religious doctrine, nor was the aim of the declaration that the Koran was created a means that suddenly sprang up for settling the status of the Book as such. The *miḥna* aimed at turning the clock back to the time when the authority of Muḥammad – whose prophethood al-Ma'mûn said a caliph inherited – was allegedly supreme and consequently centered in the caliph. This real purpose of the *miḥna* was veiled by "discussions" about the doctrine of the created Koran, as is evident, among other things, in the shift in the caliph's argument after he received word that acquiescence in the doctrine was being withheld. Now, the doctrine was relegated to the background and replaced by the theme of "obedience" to the caliph. To secure obedience, al-Ma'mûn subjected opponents to a barrage of threats and accused them, additionally, of undermining "God's religion" and Islam's cause.

'Ulamâ'. The target the caliph had singled out were not landowners, artisans, military leaders, tax collectors or partisans of one particular group or another but the *'ulamâ'* – the judges and *shuhûd*, traditionists and *fuqahâ'*. By the time of al-Ma'mûn, the *'ulamâ'* had succeeded in carving for themselves a territory of authority which rendered them *de facto* spokesmen on religious matters, thereby restricting the authority of the caliph to secular affairs. This, al-Ma'mûn was determined to undo. The *miḥna* was ordered. Especially after the initial efforts to subdue opponents failed (immediately following the first letter which was rather vague), the caliph's determination grew stronger, as evidenced by, amongst other tactics, the threats he issued, his orders for the dispatch for personal interrogation of specific men, and the instructions to the governor to lose no time publicizing the names of the *'ulamâ'* who acquiesced in the doctrine.

The caliph had no reason to involve other groups in the *miḥna* since it was only the *'ulamâ'* who stood in the way of his assuming the all-encompassing authority he was after. There was an additional bonus to be gained from using this segment of society as a target: actively engaged in the field of religion as they were, public acquiescence from them was tantamount to, first, acknowledgement that the caliph did indeed have the authority to rule on religious matters, and, second, condemning them, by their own submission, to irrelevance.

The doctrine. It remains unknown why the caliph introduced in 212/827 the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran. For lack of factual material, we are equally in the dark as to why al-Ma'mûn's choice fell on it rather than on any other issue. The doctrine in question had special merits, however. In the first place, the rules the caliph had set for the "debate" were

restricted to "tell me if you agree or disagree" – an entrapment to which the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran lent itself well. Secondly, the test had to address a theological issue since what was uppermost for al-Ma'mûn was authority on religious matters and the target of the *miḥna* were men engaged in this field – indeed, they claimed expertise in it. A third criterion making the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran uniquely suited was the "status" – or rather the lack of it – which it had in the Koran itself. The Book said nothing directly about it, but the indirect evidence which al-Ma'mûn adduced from it was perfectly consistent and logical and could scarcely be counterargued on grounds of logic. Having issued threats against those who persisted to disagree on the one hand and on the other having challenged them to refute his logic by logic which they would not or could not do, the *'ulamâ'* laid themselves bare to the charge of ignorance (which al-Ma'mûn repeatedly made) thereby emerging as the incompetent spokesmen on religious matters he said they were, and vindicating his claim that only the incumbents of the caliphal institution "to whom God gave inspired knowledge" could be the authentic spokesmen.

'Alids. Al-Ma'mûn venerated 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib, turned a blind eye to repeated 'Alid insurrections even against his own regime, and in many other ways, which ceased only with his death, the caliph showed unmistakable favoritism to members of the other wing of the Banû Hâshim, the 'Abbâsids' cousins, the 'Alids. While al-Ma'mûn's affection for the 'Alids was perhaps genuine, he, in all likelihood, also sought to reintegrate them into the mainstream of the caliphal institution, his purpose being to strengthen the foundations on which the caliphate stood and to stress its link to the sacred. It is in this light that I see al-Ma'mûn's designation as heir in 201/817 of the "most learned, most pious and most meritorious" man within the "House of the Prophet", 'Alî al-Riḍâ. Al-Ma'mûn's spelling out of the "merits" of a future caliph, and his enlargement of the pool from which posterity may choose him to include the 'Alid wing of the House of the Prophet have implications of direct relevance to the conclusion under discussion. In the first place, al-Ma'mûn served a reminder to Muslims (his 'Abbâsid family included) that the foremost criterion of legitimacy was the tie the caliphate had with the founder of the religion of Islam, Muhammad, rather than one-sided dynastic considerations – a theme the caliph was to dwell on some seventeen years after al-Riḍâ had been designated. Second, the introduction of the idea of "merit" – which he perhaps employed when he chose his brother rather than his son as successor – was meant to secure the survival of "Islam's guardian", the caliphal institution.

Suggestions for further research

(1) If the *miḥna* was indeed initiated to strengthen the caliphal institution and enhance the authority of the caliph, was this fundamentally also its *Leitmotiv* under al-Ma'mûn's successors, al-Mu'taṣim, al-Wâthiq and then al-Mutawakkil (who soon after his accession saw fit to reverse the policy)? Why did al-Mutawakkil honor Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and subsequently ask him to write about the status of the Koran? What connections, if any, did the high rank which Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal attained under al-Mutawakkil have with this caliph's repressive policies against the Jews and Christians and with his persecution of the Shi'ites and 'Alids?

(2) A close scrutiny of the circumstances surrounding al-Mu'taṣim's succession (see also 4, below) as well as the religious policy he implemented is well worth the effort. Did the Mu'tazilite Aḥmad b. Abî Du'âd play any role in the assumption to power of al-Mu'taṣim rather than al-Ma'mûn's son, al-'Abbâs? And while the results of this study indicate that the Mu'tazilites or Mu'tazilism were not pivotal for the introduction of the *miḥna*, did they or Ibn Abî Du'âd in particular play any role in shaping the policy on the *miḥna* under al-Mu'taṣim and al-Wâthiq – especially the former who was basically "a soldier" with limited intellectual baggage to make him feel at home with speculative theologians like the Mu'tazilites?

(3) It would be useful to undertake an in-depth study of as much biographical material as can be found on all those who were interrogated throughout the sixteen years of the *miḥna*. Such an undertaking could yield information of dual importance. First, with a larger pool than the 44 men on whom information was available for use in this study, the search might lead to the uncovering of patterns that may well exist but did not surface in my research. Second, it would be illuminating to find out how successive generations of chroniclers had in the course of time evaluated and reevaluated the men who consented, who refused to acquiesce, who took cover under *taqiyya*, and so forth. Such a study could also throw light on when the *miḥna* was perceived as modern scholarship now perceives it – which is quite different from the way it was reported at the time – and the specific stands taken on it by successive generations within the Islamic tradition who belonged to diverse religious groups and ideological persuasions.

(4) It is well worth researching why al-Ma'mûn had passed over his otherwise competent son al-'Abbâs by appointing his brother al-Mu'taṣim – a man who, according to some reports, sided at one point with the 'Abbâsids against al-Ma'mûn. It has been suggested in this study that the appointment of al-Mu'taṣim was linked to al-Ma'mûn's criterion of

"personal merit", but there may well have been other (contributing) factors.

Notes to Chapter One

1 Long before al-Ma'mûn, the Umayyad caliph Hishâm b. 'Abd al-Malik (r. 105/724-125/743) had Ghaylân al-Dimashqî killed for speaking of "free will" which Hishâm considered heresy (on this episode cf. Van Ess [1970] as well as his article on "*qadariyya*" in *EI2*). And al-Ma'mûn's great-grandfather, al-Mahdî (r. 158/775-169/785) and grandfather al-Hâdî (169/785-170/786) had also crucified a number of men for what they considered heresy. On heresy in Islam in general see Lewis (1953).

2 Cf. Koranic verse 2:256: "*lâ ikrâha fî al-dîn...*", meaning "no compulsion in religion".

3 For various interpretations of "caliph" and related titles: Goldziher (1897), Abel (1957), Lewis (1968), Paret (1970 and 1974), Balog (1977), Hassuri (1982), Crone and Hinds (1986) and al-Qadi (1988).

4 The traditional Islamic view is that after the death of the Prophet his successor came to fill the political dimension of the office leaving the religious one open. This view is followed by most Orientalists, amongst whom Nagel (1975), who speaks of three "*Ersatzinstitutionen*", i.e., the Koran, the *Sunna* (ways of the Prophet) and the imamate which alternatively filled up the vacuum in the religious dimension after the death of Muhammad. Crone and Hinds (1986), however, argue that contrary to the traditional view the caliphs – from the very beginning till the early 'Abbâsids – were both political and religious leaders.

5 There were other caliphates which are, however, of no direct concern to us, namely, the Umayyads in Spain and the Fâtimids in Egypt as well as the Ottomans who also laid claim to the title of caliph.

6 The bonds of loyalty in medieval Islamic society are examined by Mottahedeh (1980). Authority in the early Community is analyzed within a Weberian framework by Dabashi (1989).

7 *Ridda* refers to Abû Bakr's battles against the renegade Arab tribes in the peninsula.

8 For a detailed analysis of 'Uthmân's assassination and the parties involved, see Hinds (1972a).

9 For the particulars of this struggle see Petersen (1959, 1963) and Hinds (1972b).

10 For a general history of the Umayyad caliphate see Hawting (1987).

11 Donner (1981) provides an elaborate analysis of the early expansion of Islam.
12 On these rivalries: Hinds (1971).
13 Arab scholars are fond of quoting a maxim, whose authorship is attributed to Mu'âwiya, for it does characterize his talents and style of leadership well. The maxim translates: "Even if all I have left is a hair-thin relation with somebody else, I will hang on to it; if he pulls I loosen, if he loosens I pull" (Zaydân 1902-6, 4:349; cf. Hinds, *EI2*, s.n. "Mu'âwiya I").
14 For a history of the succession to the caliphate until the early 'Abbâsid period see Chejne (1960); see also Kennedy (1980).
15 More information on Abû Muslim can be found in Frye (1947) and *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.n. "Abû Moslem Korâsânî" (G. H. Yûsofî).
16 On the composition of the anti-Umayyad forces and in particular the connection between the 'Alids and 'Abbâsids see Cahen (1963), Nagel (1972), Omar (1975), Sharon (1983) and Elad (1986). On the 'Abbâsid support in the Persian province of Khurasan, see Shacklady (1986) and Blankenship (1988).
17 Marwân was one of numerous Umayyad notables killed in 132/749-50, the year which marks the beginning of the 'Abbâsid dynastic caliphate. One of the Umayyads lucky to escape death was 'Abd al-Rahmân I; he managed to flee to Africa and thence to Spain where he founded, a few years later, the Umayyad dynasty of Cordova.
18 An account of changes in the style of government from the late Umayyads to the early 'Abbâsids is given by Biddle (1972). The development of early 'Abbâsid administration has been charted by Nicol (1979).
19 For more information on al-Mansûr's reign: Dietrich (1952).
20 For more information on the complexity of the semantic development of the word *sunna*, see *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, s.v. "*sunna*" (G.H.A. Juynboll).
21 For a similar view on this blurriness, see Hodgson (1974, 65-6).
22 For some technical connotations of this term: Juynboll (1987).
23 Cf. Watt (1985, 56 ff.).
24 For more information on this technical term: *EI2*, s.v. "*idjmâ'*" (M. Bernand).
25 Such an *Umma*-wide conception is one which especially the Shâfi'ite scholars have espoused, and which contrasts sharply with the narrow version held by "classical" thinkers who read into *idjmâ'* the "consensus of scholars" (Watt 1973, 182).
26 On *qiyâs*: *EI2*, s.v. "*kiyâs*" (M. Bernand).

27 Shi'ism as a political theory and a view on the past struggle between 'Alî and his opponents (*tashayyu'*) emerged early indeed; in fact, the seed for it was sown in the dissent which emerged immediately upon the Prophet's death (described above) and which served to transform the word *shî'a* as "partisanship" (in favor of 'Alî) into Shi'ism, with a capital "S", as a "religious division". As time went by, the political aspects of Shi'ism assumed less significance than its religious doctrine. A more specific definition of *tashayyu'* is found in Juynboll (1983, 48-9).

28 For the complexities involved in the term "Shi'ites" see Van Ess (1991-, 1:233-403 and cf. 1:233). A good introduction to Shi'ism is that of Halm (1988).

29 Besides the Twelver Shi'ites and the Zaydites, there are two other umbrella groups, the extreme Shi'ites and the Seveners (Cf. Halm 1988).

30 See Goldziher (1901) for a number of disparaging names given by the Shi'ites to the "false caliphs".

31 To be sure, the concept of *imâm* is not foreign to the Sunnites, but it means something very different to them, certainly not carrying the connotations of "infallibility and immaculateness" which the Twelvers consider characteristic of the *imâm*. For most of the Sunnites, the word *imâm* stands simply for any pious man who happens to lead the Friday prayer. The Sunnites use *imâm* also as an honorific title for eminent doctors of Islam such as the founders of the schools of law.

32 For an analysis of *'aql* as used by the Mu'tazilites see Bernand (1972-3).

33 For more information on the general Islamic meaning given to this duty see *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 1:992-5, s.v. "*Amr be ma'rûf*" (W. Madelung), Bercher (1955), Lambton (1981, 310-5) and Van Ess (1991-, 2:387-90).

34 On the relationship between the Mu'tazilites and *hadîth*: Van Ess (1982).

35 Cf. also one of the earliest *tafsîr* (Koran commentary) works, a *tafsîr* compiled by Muhammad al-Kalbî (66-146/685-763); on him see Sezgin (1967, 34) and *EI2*, s.n. al-Kalbî (W. Atallah). In this work, al-Kalbî reports that his teacher al-Suddî (Ismâ'îl b. 'Abd al-Rahmân, d. 127/744-5 [Ibn Hadjar, *Tahdhîb* 1:274]) had spoken of the Koran as being not created (... *wa yuqâl ghayr dhî 'iwadj* [i.e., the Koran] *ghayr makhlûq wa huwa qawl al-Suddî*) (MS. *Chester Beatty, no. 4224*, ff. 188 b 27-29). This may indicate that the origins of the discussion on the status of the Koran had existed prior to 127/744-5.

36 One of the connotations is certainly negative. It is, however, not known when this word acquired its negative connotation. Wensinck (*EI1*, s.v.

"*miḥna*") says that the word *miḥna*, as a noun, is "derived from the root *m-ḥ-n*, appearing in the Arabic verb *maḥana*, 'to smooth', and in some Aethiopic derivations, trial (e.g. the trials to which the prophets and especially the family of Muḥammad, the 'Alids, are exposed in this world; ... inquisition.)" Patton (1897, 1, n. 1) states that the term generally means a "testing" or "trial". This can be due to "accidents of fortune or the actions of men". Patton adds that *miḥna* is often used together with the VIIIth form of *maḥana* (*imtaḥana*) to refer to "a religious test with a view to obtaining assent to some particular belief or system of beliefs." Hinds (*EI2*, s.v.) adds to Patton's remarks a citation from Abû al-'Arab al-Tamîmî's *Kitâb al-miḥan* to illustrate a general meaning which refers to someone who has "been afflicted (*ubtuliya*) by being killed, imprisoned, flogged, or threatened...". Dozy (1881) reflects both views given above: "persécution" and "le tourment, la torture". Lane (1863-93) does not add anything substantial to the above. Finally, while the foregoing definitions tend to stress the negative, the verb *imtaḥana* also means "to look into" or "to examine an issue or a person such as a student" (Ibn Manẓûr, *Lisân al-'Arab*, sub "*m ḥ n*").

37 Contrary to the impression one gains from reading the otherwise careful Patton (1897), there is no evidence to substantiate the claim (p. 1, n. 1) that the nineteenth 'Abbâsid caliph al-Qâhir (r. 320/932-322/934) initiated an inquisition. The best explanation I can come up with is that Patton probably confused this caliph with al-Qâdir. On the religious policies of this caliph, see Makdisi (1963, 299 ff.). There are two other episodes in the annals of classical Islamic history which bear some resemblance to the *miḥna* which al-Ma'mûn initiated. In 323/935 the twentieth 'Abbâsid caliph al-Râḍî (r. 322/934-329/940) issued an edict condemning the doctrine and activities of the Ḥanbalites. There is, however, no evidence that this order led to an inquisition; it simply banned gatherings by the Ḥanbalites. The second event occurred during the reign of the 25th 'Abbâsid caliph al-Qâdir (r. 381/991-422/1031) who forbade non-traditionists from spreading their ideologies. Again, as in the case of al-Râḍî, a real inquisition was apparently not carried out.

38 Lichtenstädter (1943, especially 47-9).

39 For an account of his reign, see Miah (1969). Abbott (1938) has also scrutinized papyri dating back to his reign.

40 A classic Sunnite position on the uncreatedness of the Koran was to be formulated toward the end of the fourth/tenth century by the theologian al-Bâqillânî (d. 403/1013) though others before him had written on the subject. A presentation of al-Bâqillânî's views regarding the Koran is given by Bouman (1959). An overview of the development of

Muslim theological views on the Koran is found in *EI2*, s.v. "*al-Ḳur'ân*", section 8: "The *Ḳur'ân* in Muslim life and thought" (A. Welch).

Notes to Chapter Two

1 In writing this chapter I primarily drew on the following works: *EI1*, s.n. "al-Ma'mûn" (K.V. Zetterstéen); *EI2*, s.n. "al-Ma'mûn" (M. Rekaya); *EI2*, s.v. "'Abbâsids" (B. Lewis); Sourdel (1970); Hitti (1968) and Kennedy (1981).
2 His *kunya* (patronymic) was either Abû al-'Abbâs or Abû Dja'far.
3 On the subject of the education of the 'Abbâsid nobles, see Dietrich (1976).
4 Al-Kisâ'î, who died in 189/805, was a well-known Arab philologist and Koran-reader. The caliph al-Mahdî had made him the tutor of his son al-Rashîd who in turn appointed him tutor of his two sons al-Amîn and al-Ma'mûn; *EI2*, s.n. "al-Kisâ'î" (R. Sellheim).
5 Al-Yazîdî (died 202/817) was, like al-Kisâ'î, a philologist and Koran-reader. According to Abbott (1946, 174-5), al-Yazîdî taught the Koran to al-Ma'mûn, and al-Amîn learned the Koran from al-Kisâ'î.
6 A companion of the famous jurist Abû Ḥanîfa and erstwhile judge of al-Kûfa. He transmitted *ḥadîth* from Abû Ḥanîfa. Died in 204/819-20; al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, *Ta'rîkh Baghdâd*, 7:314-7 and Wakî', *Akhbâr al-ḳuḍât*, 3:188-9.
7 On al-Hâdî's short reign: see Moscati (1946).
8 For a number of specific aspects of the reign of al-Rashîd see Bittermann (1929), Canard (1962), el-'Alî (1971), Ahsan (1976) and Bonner (1988, 1989).
9 Or, having been hung on the Ka'ba, it is also called the "Ka'ba Accord". For an in-depth analysis of this document and its significance see Kimber (1986).
10 An overview of the tug of war between the two empires of Islam and Byzantium is given by Canard (1966).
11 Member of the Barmakid family who, together with his father, Yaḥyâ b. Khâlid, and brother, al-Faḍl b. Yaḥyâ, played a very important role in the administration of the empire under al-Rashîd until this caliph had them removed. On the Barmakids, see Bouvat (1912), Sourdel (1959-60, 127-81) and Meisami (1989).
12 City in the Naysâbûr region of Khurasan; Le Strange (1930, 388) and Yâqût, *Mu'djam al-buldân*, 4:49-50.
13 For this man's career: Chejne (1962).

14 On this fraternal and divisive war, see Gabrieli (1928) and Samadi (1958).

15 A *ṭirâz* was a garment with embroidered bands bearing inscriptions worn by a ruler or a high official. On this term, see Ahsan (1979, 68-70).

16 According to Muslim tradition (Hodgson 1974), the other three civil wars (*fitan*, pl. of *fitna*) in the history of Islam are chronologically the struggle of: (a) the forces of 'Alî against those of 'Â'iṯha, Zubayr and Talha (35-41/656-661); (b) the forces of Yazîd I and those of Ibn al-Żubayr (59-73/680-692); (c) the forces of the Umayyads against the pro-'Abbâsid forces (125-133/744-750), the war which ended with the ascension of the victorious 'Abbâsid dynasty to the caliphate.

17 The *abnâ'* were the descendants of Khurasanians who had settled in the western part of the empire (especially in Baghdad) after aiding the 'Abbâsids in taking over the caliphate from the Umayyads.

18 A province located between Iraq and Khurasan just under the Caspian Sea. It included the important city of Rayy (close to present-day Tehran); Le Strange (1930, 185-231) and Yâqût, *Mu'ḏjam al-buldân*, 2:99-100.

19 Shortly after the second 'Abbâsid caliph al-Manṣûr came to power, he distanced himself from his former revolutionary associates, the Shi'ites. Conversely, his son, the third 'Abbâsid caliph al-Mahdî, tried to gain the support of Shi'ite groups, then distanced himself from them. Al-Hâdî's one year reign witnessed a massacre of Shi'ite rebels at Faḵhḵh. Especially toward the end of his reign, al-Rashîd was intolerant of the Shi'ites.

20 On this man and his revolt see Tornberg (1868, especially 706-7) and Arioli (1974).

21 Harṯhama b. A'yan was one of the chief commanders under al-Rashîd as well. He remained an important military figure until his execution at the court of al-Ma'mûn at Marw in 200/816 probably due to the machinations of al-Faḍl b. Sahl.

22 "The pleasing-one within the family of [the Prophet] Muḥammad." This was also one of the slogans used by 'Abbâsid propagandists against the Umayyads in an attempt to woo the Shi'ites to their side; it will be discussed in the chapters to follow.

23 Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Zayd was nicknamed Zayd al-Nâr (Zayd the "firebrand" or "agitator") due to his destruction of 'Abbâsid properties in al-Kûfa and al-Baṣra.

24 Province located northwest of Khurasan along the Caspian Sea; Le Strange (1930, 376-81) and Yâqût, *Mu'ḏjam al-buldân*, 2:119-22.

25 After Hamdawayh had suppressed these Shi'ite revolts he subsequently tried to set himself up as an independent ruler in the Yemen and was only removed by force (Van Arendonk 1919, 94-5).
26 Located northwest of the Round City ("the City of al-Mansûr") of Baghdad just after passing the Syria Gate; Le Strange (1900, 122-35).
27 Initially, the 'Abbâsids in Baghdad had asked him to assume greater authority, but al-Mansûr refused, saying that he would only represent the caliph and not more.
28 On the *'ayyârûn* (= lower classes) of Baghdad see Sabari (1981), especially pp. 77 ff.
29 He received the oath of allegiance in the Great Mosque of Baghdad on 5 Muharram 202/24 July 817. Ibrâhîm b. al-Mahdî adopted the regnal name of al-Mubârak.
30 Ishâq was both the anti-caliph's nephew as well as first cousin and brother-in-law of al-Ma'mûn.
31 On this anti-caliphate: Barbier de Meynard (1869).
32 Shortly after his brother's death, al-Hasan b. Sahl disappeared completely from the political arena; the reason why is unknown. Some eight years later (in Ramadân 210/December 825-January 826), the caliph consummated his marriage to al-Hasan b. Sahl's daughter Bûrân. Al-Hasan b. Sahl died in 236/850-1.
33 On the Tâhirids, see Sourdel (1958), Bosworth (1969, 1970 and 1975) and Kaabi (1972).
34 As was stated in the first chapter, Ishâq b. Ibrâhîm was the man who conducted the *mihna* interrogations of 218/833 in Baghdad. He maintained his position as head of the *shurta* until his death in 235/850.
35 Bâbak was a leader of the movement of the "Khurramiyya". The exact origin and teachings of this group are still unclear despite the existence of extensive relevant literature. For a survey of views on this matter, see *EI2*, s.n. "Khurramiyya" (W. Madelung); cf. also Rekaya (1974) and Wright (1948).
36 This military leader had been in al-Ma'mûn's service since the Civil War.
37 Muhammad b. Humayd was the son of the prominent military commander Humayd b. 'Abd al-Hamîd who had fought the rebellious Baghdadis while serving under al-Hasan b. Sahl in 201-3/816-9 and who had died in 210/825-6.
38 On 'Abbâsid military organization, see Hoenerbach (1950).
39 Fârs was located between Khurasan and the Persian Gulf; Le Strange (1930, 248-99) and Yâqût, *Mu'djam al-buldân*, 4:226-8.

40 This venture was undertaken after Abû Ishâq had been battling in Egypt since 214/829 attempting in vain to put down a serious uprising by both Muslims and Copts.

41 The first of these two campaigns was in 215/830, and the second, which was at least in part prompted by an attack by the Byzantine empire on Muslim fortifications, took place in 216/831.

42 After al-Ma'mûn's death there were at least two attempts to make al-'Abbâs caliph, mainly by troops of the Byzantine frontier area. These failed, however, and al-'Abbâs died in prison in 223/838.

Notes to Chapter Three

1 Primarily Sourdel (1962) and Watt (1973).

2 Abû al-Hudhayl al-'Allâf (d. 227/841 or 235/849) belonged to the so-called Basra school of Mu'tazilism, one which interested itself more in theory than in the practical applications to which the Baghdadi school was more inclined. Much of the credit Abû al-Hudhayl earned goes to his diligence in adapting Greek philosophy to Islamic thought. Abû al-Hudhayl had a searching mind and independence of thought which led him, for instance, to question the validity of astrology despite its universal appeal for centuries. Abû al-Hudhayl's association with al-Ma'mûn dates back to 202-3/818, the year Thumâma b. Ashras introduced him to the caliph (Watt 1973, 219).

3 Abû Ishâq Ibrâhîm b. Sayyâr al-Nazzâm (d. 231/845) is noted, among other things, for the severity of his criticism of the *muhaddithûn* (traditionists) (Van Ess 1982, especially 218-9) for their literalism, narrow-mindedness and insufficient use of their critical faculties. A thoroughgoing skeptic and an experimentalist at heart (he tested, for example, the tolerance for alcoholic drink of different species of animals), al-Nazzâm was an outspoken foe of what he considered superstition including the notion of *djinn* (jinn) even though it is mentioned in the Koran (Amîn 1933-6, 3:114). Al-Nazzâm also dared to criticize the Companions of the Prophet (early supporters of Muhammad from Mecca and Medina) reducing them to human size.

Abû 'Uthmân 'Amr b. Bahr (d. 255/869), known as al-Djâhiz (the goggle-eyed) may not have had the mental powers of his fellow Basran Mu'tazilite al-Nazzâm, but he was of broader literary knowledge. He, too, was critical of the *ahl al-hadîth* (traditionists); when they attacked his treatise on the createdness of the Koran as propagating a notion that had not been held by *al-salaf* (early distinguished Muslims), he shot back challenging them to name a *salaf* who had said that the Book was uncreated. Al-Djâhiz reportedly wrote books on the cali-

phate which were read by al-Ma'mûn who was pleased by them (*Rasâ'il*, Editor's Introduction, p. 13). Al-Djâhiz is said to have started a Mu'tazilite sub-school of his own (Van Ess 1966).

4 The Baghdadi Mu'tazilite Thumâma b. Ashras (d. 213/828) was a man of great learning who was especially noted for his wit and his unusual ability to articulate arguments (Cf. Van Ess 1968 especially 1-3).

5 The other being Bishr b. al-Mu'tamir (d. between 210-26/825-40), founder of the Baghdadi branch of Mu'tazilism (Watt 1973, 178).

6 Ahmad b. Abî Du'âd (d. 240/854) was reportedly a man of many talents and assets. A judge and administrator at the caliphal court, he was also a profound thinker, noted poet, and an exceedingly generous man. See on him in general *EI2*, s.n. (K.V. Zetterstéen-Ch. Pellat).

7 Notably Sourdel (1962) and Nagel (1975).

8 'Ârif (1987, 326) and Amîn (1933-6, 275). While some Zaydite groups had qualms about this, the sect's eponym (Zayd, the great-grandson of 'Alî b. Abî Tâlib) did not disapprove of Abû Bakr's caliphate even though he did emphatically consider 'Alî to have been "*al-afḍal*" (the most excellent) ('Ârif 1987, 341).

9 Mentioned by Sourdel (1962); Watt (1973); Rifâ'î (1927); al-Dûrî (1945) and 'Umar (1977) amongst others.

10 On this dynasty, see Talbi (1966).

11 'Umar (1977, 222) suggests that the notion of "*hudâ*" as used by al-Ma'mûn and his ancestors may have been based on Koranic verse 21:73 which says "We appointed them to be leaders guiding by Our command ... (*wa djaʿalnâhum aʾimmatan yahdûna bi-amrinâ* ...).

12 Likewise argued by Sourdel (1962, especially 44).

13 I.e., utterance of the formula *Allâhu akbar* (God is great).

Notes to Chapter Four

1 Al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûdj*, 4:227.

2 Al-Dînawarî, 396.

3 Ibn al-Murtaḍâ, 49.

4 Ibn Khallikân, 6:177; al-Shahrastânî, 71.

5 Ibn al-Murtaḍâ, 61.

6 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1139. Also recorded in Ibn Khallikân's account of the life of Ibn Abî Du'âd, 1:84. The statement is omitted in Ibn al-Athîr's summary of the testament (5:226-7) as well as in Ibn al-'Imâd's heavily edited version (2:43).

7 *Kitâb al-ʿuyûn*, 380.

8Yaḥyâ b. Aktham (159/775-242/857) was born in Marw. He was introduced to al-Ma'mûn when the latter arrived in Khurasan. After serving as judge of al-Baṣra, he became chief judge (*qâḍî al-quḍât*) of Baghdad. He was reportedly very close to al-Ma'mûn and advised the caliph on many occasions. Yaḥyâ b. Aktham lost his position when al-Mu'taṣim became caliph (Ibn Abî Du'âd was his replacement), but he was reinstated after al-Mutawakkil came to power. He probably did not believe in the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran and was supportive of the traditionists (cf. Ibn Khallikân, 1:84 and 6:147-65).

9This is reflected in two episodes which I have encountered. One has to do with al-Ma'mûn's intent on cursing Mu'âwiya and his change of heart as Yaḥyâ b. Aktham persuaded him by referring to the hazard of arousing passions needlessly (Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr, 91-2; cf. Nagel 1975, 150). On another occasion, Yaḥyâ b. Aktham was able to dissuade the caliph from sanctioning the *mut'a* marriage (al-Khaṭîb al-Baghdâdî, 14:199-200).

10Al-Baghdâdî, 103.

11Ibn al-'Imâd, 2:39.

12Ibn al-Murtaḍâ, 122 and 127.

13Al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûḍj*, 4:227. An interesting detail of al-Mas'ûdî's account of al-Ma'mûn's intellectual orientation is his report that the caliph was interested in the works of the Sassanian rulers and ancient books as well as astrology. The caliph had acquired this interest, so we are told, under the influence of al-Faḍl b. Sahl. After al-Ma'mûn moved from Khurasan to Baghdad (which followed the death of his vizier) he abandoned these subjects in favor of Mu'tazilite teachings and held court debates with speculative theologians (*mutakallimûn*). This report is conveyed also by al-Ya'qûbî in his essay on Islamic history, *Mushâkalat al-nâs li-zamânihim*, 27-8.

14Al-Ya'qûbî, *Ta'rîkh*, 2:467-8.

15Among the topics on which people were interrogated, were, according to Miskawayh (p. 465), the two related ones of the createdness of the Koran and anthropomorphism. In Mu'tazilite theology anthropomorphism (*tashbîh*) as well as the view that the Koran is not created run counter to the idea of the absolute unity of God.

16Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr, 338-43 and 344-6; al-Ṭabarî, III:1113-5 and III:1118, 1126 and 1130.

17Al-Ṭabarî, III:1136.

18Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr, 66.

19See the introduction by S. Diwald-Wilzer to the *Ṭabaqât al-mu'tazila*, p. v-vii for the intimate connection between the two.

latter group used in attacking the [illegible]
tion, the Murdji'ites were of the opinion that even a person judged as a grave sinner could still end up in Paradise. The Mu'tazilites on the other hand, due to their belief in man's free will, held the view that people would be punished or rewarded in accordance with the kind of life they chose to lead (Madelung 1965, 11).

22 Cf. Van Ess (1967-8). In this article, he argues that al-Ma'mûn was a "Dirârit" (p. 34) a follower of Dirâr b. 'Amr, a *mutakallim* ("rational theologian") with whom the Mu'tazilites were at odds due to the fact that he allowed God some say in the deeds of men. While I agree with his conclusion that al-Ma'mûn could not be counted within the ranks of the Mu'tazilites, I disagree with his labeling the caliph a Dirârite: Al-Ma'mûn could not be classified as a Dirârite without qualifications because the views of the two men were poles apart on an issue of vital importance to the caliph, namely leadership of the Islamic Community. Dirâr b. 'Amr, himself a man of Arab descent, was of the opinion that also a non-Arab —let alone a non-Qurayshite— could in principle be caliph. Al-Ma'mûn held the firm view that the leader of the Community had to be at least a member of the Family of the Prophet.

23 Like, for instance, Laoust (1965), who has al-Ma'mûn's reign initiate what he calls "le califat mu'tazilite". Also contrary to the assumption that al-Ma'mûn was a Mu'tazilite found in the works of Amîn (1933-6, 3:85 and 3:295), Hitti (1968, 89), Shaban (1976, 54) and Sourdel (1962, 43) amongst others.

24 Al-Ma'mûn's hesitancy is noted also by al-Dhahabî (8th/14th century, *Tarjamat*, 40).

25 See for variants of the doctrine by, for instance, non-Mu'tazilite *mutakallimûn*: Van Ess (1967; recently translated into French, Van Ess 1990).

26 Madelung (1974, 509), Van Ess (1967-8, 51) and Watt (1973, 283-4). I shall additionally argue in 5.3.3 that al-Ma'mûn did not construe the createdness of the Koran dogma as an issue of doctrinal significance that had to be accepted for its own sake.

27 The line which the Mu'tazilites and al-Ma'mûn took was that those who do not profess a created Koran are putting an object (the Koran) at a par with God and hence allowing that object to share in an attribute which belongs to God alone (namely His eternity) and thus violating the idea of God's absolute unity (Madelung 1974, 516-7).

28 The prominent religious lawyer and theologian Abû Ḥanîfa al-Nu'mân lived from 80/699 till 150/767.

29 According to Ibn al-Taghrîbirdî (2:225) al-Ma'mûn "had distinguished himself (*bara'a*) in *fiqh* (law) according to the school of Abû Ḥanîfa".

30 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1113-4 and 1118.

31 On Abû Ḥanîfa's argumentation against an uncreated Koran and the differences with the Mu'tazilite stance see Madelung (1974, especially 511).

32 Patton (1897, 55), however, thinks differently. The source he cites is the very late Sunnite writer al-Subkî (2:38) who alleges that Aḥmad b. Abî Du'âd had pushed the caliph to introducing the *miḥna* in 218/833. Nowhere in the sources I have scrutinized could I find evidence to corroborate al-Subkî's narrative. It is also contrary to Amîn's (1933-6, 3:159) undocumented claim that Ibn Abî Du'âd was the "greatest impetus behind the *miḥna*" (*akbar sabab fî hâdhihi al-miḥna*) since Aḥmad b. Abî Du'âd only became prominent under al-Mu'taṣim and his successor. Cf. Van Ess (1967-8, 35 ff.) where evidence is presented that (the Ḍirârite) Bishr al-Marîsî was possibly "der geistige Kopf der frühen Inquisition".

33 This is a temporary form of marriage that can be contracted for pleasure or convenience.

34 That is, uttering the formula "God is great" (*Allâhu akbar*).

35 *EI2* s.v. "*mut'a*" (W. Heffening). A number of Zaydites, for instance, did not permit *mut'a*.

36 Al-Khaṭîb al-Baghdâdî, 14:199-200.

37 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1105; al-Azdî, 405 and Ibn al-Athîr 5:220.

38 The salutation which ends the usual prayer.

39 *Da'â'im al-Islâm*, 1:205.

40 Al-Kulaynî, *al-Kâfî*, 3:310, nos. 3 and 7; al-Sharîf al-Murtaḍâ, *al-Intiṣâr*, 40. My thanks go to Professor E. Kohlberg who was kind enough to help me on this matter.

41 I am indebted to Dr. G.H.A. Juynboll for suggesting this possible interpretation of the episode. One can muse that al-Ma'mûn's order falls in the same category as Ṣaddâm Ḥusayn's decision to add the *takbîr* to the Iraqi flag during the Gulf War of 1991. Perhaps al-Ma'mûn was preparing his troops for the impending attack on the Byzantines which the caliph was planning at the time. Lapidus (1975, 378), as stated in Chapter 3, interprets this order as a measure taken by al-Ma'mûn to enhance the religious authority of the caliph.

42 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1136.

43 The Shi'ites derived the prescribed five *takbîr*s from their belief that Seth had prayed over Adam using this same number (Kohlberg 1980, 62-3). The Sunnite schools of law reject this account and their prescription calls for four *takbîr*s. For the standard Sunnite version see Grütter (1954 and 1957) especially part V ("Das Gebet über dem Toten") (1957:87 ff.).

44 Watt says essentially the following which, first, describes the status of the *imâm*, then that of the Koran and, finally, the connection between the two. An *imâm*, a "true caliph", towers above mankind because he is chosen by God and possesses superhuman qualities. There is a great difference in the "prestige" value of a created versus an uncreated Koran. One cannot, for example, change an uncreated Koran since, then, one would be tampering with God Himself. "A created Qur'ân had not the same prestige [as an uncreated one], and there could not be the same objection to its provisions being overruled by the decree of an inspired imam" (p. 179).

If one reads into this that al-Ma'mûn (who claimed for himself superhuman qualities) was, by declaring that the Koran was created, of a Shi'ite coloring, such a conclusion overreaches the facts. There is no record to be found in which al-Ma'mûn placed himself above the Book or questioned the Koran – or the Prophet's *ḥadîth* for that matter – and all the Koranic verses which he cited in his *miḥna* letters were interpreted by him with impeccable logic and fidelity to the text.

45 Ṣafwat, 3:377-97.

46 Al-Irbilî, 3:123 ff.

47 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1112 ff.; Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr, 338 ff.

48 These were in the context of three poems. The first, reported by al-Iṣfahânî (*al-Aghânî*, 20:266) was composed for al-Ma'mûn on the request of Zubayda, al-Amîn's mother, at a time which coincided with the caliph's entry into Baghdad in 204/819. On the second of these two

occasions, al-Ṣafadî (659-60) quotes verses from three love poems attributed to al-Ma'mûn, wherein the caliph referred to himself as *imâm*. There was, finally, a poem in which al-Ma'mûn is referred to as "the seventh *imâm*", i.e., the seventh 'Abbâsid caliph (Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr, 204; al-Ṭabarî, III:1080; al-Azdî, 371).

49 This is claimed by al-Dûrî (1945, 153, n. 5), Sourdel (1962, 37), Watt (1973, 177) and 'Umar (1977, 222).

50 1988, 47-8, n. 155.

51 Miles (1938, 90). Al-Ma'mûn also used the title of *imâm* on a number of his coins, some of which date back to 203/818-9 (Miles 1938, 105).

52 Usage of the title *khalîfat Allâh* is stressed by Crone and Hinds (1986, 94-6). Miles (1938, 103-7) identifies coins on which al-Ma'mûn is referred to as *khalîfat Allâh*.

53 Madelung's analysis referred to here was part of an exhaustive study of the relationships between the views of the Shi'ites, especially the Zaydites, and the Mu'tazilites. In this (pp. 153 ff.) as well as later works Madelung (1970, 1989a) presents much evidence to indicate that it was only during the period that followed al-Ma'mûn's death that the Shi'ites/Zaydites had incorporated into their systems Mu'tazilite ideas which presumably included the doctrine that the Koran was created.

54 The use of these terms indiscriminately may lead one to automatically read into al-Ma'mûn's pro-'Alid policy partiality to Shi'ism. As was pointed, in 1.2.2 the two groups overlap, but they can by no means be equated.

55 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1099; al-Azdî, 373; Miskawayh, 463; *Kitâb al-'uyûn*, 370.

56 A discussion of this issue took place around 204/819 (Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr, 75-9). The later chronicler al-Suyûṭî (247) has a version in which we are told that al-Ma'mûn considered 'Alî preeminent over the first two caliphs of Islam, Abû Bakr and 'Umar. Other later chroniclers (Ibn al-Athîr, 5:216, Ibn al-Taghrîbirdî, 2:201-3, Ibn al-'Imâd, 2:25 and al-Ṣafadî, 658-9) only mention the preeminence of 'Alî.

57 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1098, Ibn al-Athîr, 5:215, al-Suyûṭî, 247 and Ibn al-'Imâd, 2:25 record this event as occurring in the year 211/826-7. Others date it a year later (al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûdj*, 3:454-5, al-Maqdisî, 112, Miskawayh, 463, *Kitâb al-'uyûn*, 370 —which closely resembles Miskawayh's account). Al-Ṣafadî, 658, dating the event also as having occurred in 212/827-8, adds that people were given a warning against beseeching God to grant Mu'âwiya mercy.

58 Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr, 91-2; Ibn al-Murtaḍâ, 64-5.

59 Al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûdj*, 3:454-5. This naturally corresponds with the official Umayyad version of events.

60 Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr, 16-7.

61 The Shi'ite scholar Ibn Bâbawayh, 2:145, for example, tells us that al-Ma'mûn ascribed healing powers to 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib as well as to his descendants. Al-Ya'qûbî, *Ta'rîkh*, 2:454, has al-Ma'mûn declare that he wedded his daughter to the descendant of 'Alî b. Mûsâ al-Riḍâ because the caliph longed to be the grandfather of a child from the lineage of 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib (the couple remained childless). Al-Iṣfahânî, another Shi'ite, narrates (in the *Kitâb al-aghânî*, 10:133) a dream which Ibrâhîm b. al-Mahdî is said to have had about 'Alî leading al-Ma'mûn to make a highly disparaging remark about Ibrâhîm b. al-Mahdî (al-Ma'mûn's uncle) — and to his face. This "dream story" is repeated in al-Ṣafadî (660-1) who supplies an additional one in which we are told that al-Ma'mûn backed down from legalizing the *mut'a* form of marriage upon hearing a confirmation that 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib did not approve of it (al-Ṣafadî, 659).

62 Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr, 10. In this meeting with 'Alid notables, al-Ma'mûn also urged them to "let bygones be bygones" probably referring to previous discords with the 'Abbâsid wing of the family and to more recent rebellions by some disgruntled 'Alids.

63 Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr, 86. Ibn Bâbawayh and al-Mas'ûdî give an explicit explanation for al-Ma'mûn's attachment to the 'Alids. Ibn Bâbawayh, 75-6, says the caliph had acquired his 'Alid leanings at his father's court while still a child. Al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûdj*, 4:242-3, has a story in which al-Ma'mûn explained that he favored the 'Alids because 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib had given support to the 'Abbâsids. This last theme of "repaying an old debt" is stressed by Zaydân (1902-6) and Gabrieli (1929) who consider al-Ma'mûn's partiality to the 'Alids genuine.

64 As listed in al-Khalîfa b. Khayyâṭ and al-Ṭabarî, the *ḥadjdj* was led in the year 202/818 by Ibrâhîm b. Mûsâ, the brother of 'Alî b. Mûsâ al-Riḍâ; in 204/820, 205/821 and 206/822 by 'Ubaydallâh b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Ubaydallâh b. 'Abbâs b. 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib. Al-Mas'ûdî (*Murûdj*, 4:309) adds that Ibrâhîm b. Mûsâ was the first Ṭâlibid ever to lead the pilgrimage. For a complete list of those who led the pilgrimage from the beginning of Islam up till the year 335/947 see al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûdj*, 4:301-13.

65 Around 203/818-9, for instance (al-Mas'ûdî, *Murudj*, 3:447).

66 Al-Iṣfahânî, *Maqâtil*, 541; Ibn al-Athîr, 5:195; Ibn al-'Imâd, 2:7. The man died in 209/824-5.

67 The property of Fadak reversed hands more than once. As reported by al-Ya'qûbî, *Ta'rîkh*, 2:469, and al-Balâdhurî, *Futûḥ al-buldân*, 33-8, upon the death of the Prophet, Fâṭima pressed her claim to it but Abû Bakr declined to give her this property on grounds that the Prophet

intended its income for charity. Al-Balâdhurî adds that al-Ma'mûn's decision was reversed again by al-Mutawakkil when he came to power.

68 Also recorded by Marquet (1972, 127-8).

69 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1136-40. As stated earlier, this will is summarized by Ibn al-Athîr, 5:226-7 and carefully edited by the very late Ḥanbalite writer Ibn al-'Imâd (2:43). Ibn al-'Imâd toned down references to both al-Ma'mûn's pro-'Alid stance and the caliph's position with regard to the createdness of the Koran.

70 Al-Khalîfa, 764; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ârif*, 388; al-Ya'qûbî, *Ta'rîkh*, 2:448; al-Ṭabarî, III:1012-3; al-Maqdisî, 110; Ibn Bâbawayh, 2:146; Ibn al-Athîr, 5:183; Ibn Khaldûn, 1:281; al-Khaṭîb al-Baghdâdî, 10:184; Ibn Khallikân, 1:39-40; Ibn al-'Imâd, 2:2; al-Iṣfahânî, *Kitâb al-aghânî*, 10:52-3. On the account of the designation in general by contemporary scholars, see Ḥasan (1933); Donaldson (1933, 161-7); Abbott (1946, 224); Cahen (1968, 91-2); Marquet (1972, 111); Watt (1973, 176-8); Kennedy (1981, 157 ff. and 1986, 153-4) and Huddâra (1985, 136 ff.).

71 Ibn Bâbawayh, 2:138-9, for example, has a version in which he says that the caliph was so keen on gaining 'Alî's consent to the designation that he was willing to use force to secure it. Al-Iṣfahânî's account (*Maqâtil*, 561) implies that the caliph cherished 'Alî al-Riḍâ more than he did Abû Bakr, Islam's first caliph. The Sunnite Ibn al-Taghrîbirdî, 2:169 and 2:174-5, was among those who described the occasion in such terms as to make al-Ma'mûn subservient to his designee. Another Sunnite, Ibn Kathîr (10:247) informs us that al-Ma'mûn transmitted *ḥadîth* from 'Alî al-Riḍâ.

72 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1012-3; Ibn Bâbawayh, 2:146; Miskawayh, 435-6; Ibn al-Athîr, 5:183; Ibn al-'Ibrî, 233; al-Irbilî, 3:50; Ibn Ṭiqṭaqâ, 217; Ibn Kathîr, 10:247; al-Suyûṭî, 246; al-Khaṭîb al-Baghdâdî, 10:184; Ibn al-'Imâd, 2:2. The slogan of *al-riḍâ min âl Muḥammad* was used by the 'Abbâsids in the takeover from the Umayyads (Shaban 1970, 155; Sharon 1983, 147) primarily to acquire the support of the *shî'at 'Alî* who restricted leadership of the Community to the Prophet's family. For a description of some variations on the meaning of the slogan see Nagel (1972, 107-16); Crone (1989) and Madelung (1989b.).

73 Al-Ya'qûbî, *Ta'rîkh*, 2:448; al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûdj*, 3:440-1; al-Iṣfahânî, *Maqâtil*, 563-4; Ibn Bâbawayh, 2:146; al-Irbilî, 3:66; al-Suyûṭî, 246; Ibn Khallikân, 3:269-70; al-Iṣfahânî, *Kitâb al-aghânî*, 10:52-3. The first coins with 'Alî's name were minted in 202/817-8 and the last in Muharram 204/June-July 819, probably just a few weeks after the death of 'Alî al-Riḍâ (Miles 1938, 103-108).

74 Black was decreed as the offical color of the 'Abbâsid dynasty by al-Manṣûr in 145/762-3 ('Athamina 1989, 318).

75 Al-Khalîfa, 764; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ârif*, 388; Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr, 2; al-Ya'qûbî, *Ta'rîkh*, 2:448; al-Ṭabarî, III:1013; al-Djahshiyârî, 312; al-Maqdisî, 110; al-Azdî, 341-2 and 353; al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûdj*, 4:440-1; al-Iṣfahânî, *Maqâtil*, 563-4; Ibn Bâbawayh, 2:146; Miskawayh, 435-6; *Kitâb al-'uyûn*, 353; Ibn al-Athîr, 5:183; Ibn al-'Ibrî, 233; al-Irbilî, 3:66-7; Ibn Kathîr, 10:247; Ibn Khaldûn, 4:18; al-Suyûṭî, 246; al-Khaṭîb al-Baghdâdî, 10:187; Ibn Khallikân, 3:269-70; al-Ṣafadî, 657; Ibn al-'Imâd, 2:2. The color green did not stand for the 'Alids exclusively (Sourdel 1970, 122; 'Umar 1977, 252-3; 'Athamina 1989, 325) or any other particular group (Weil 1848, 2:216-7, n. 3; 'Athamina 1989, 325). The only primary source encountered which had anything to say on the meaning of the color green was Ibn Ṭiqṭiqâ (p. 217) who states that green stands for the color of Paradise. He is probably alluding to Koranic verses 18:31 and 76:21.

76 Al-Iṣfahânî, *Maqâtil*, 563-4; al-Irbilî, 3:66-7.

77 Al-Iṣfahânî, *Maqâtil*, 563-4. The military leaders were subsequently granted one year's provision.

78 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1029; Ibn Kathîr, 10:249.

79 Al-Ya'qûbî, *Ta'rîkh*, 2:454; al-Ṭabarî, III:1029; al-Maqdisî, 110; al-Azdî, 343; al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûdj*, 3:440-1; al-Iṣfahânî, *Maqâtil*, 565; Ibn Bâbawayh, 2:146; Miskawayh, 444; *Kitâb al-'uyûn*, 357; Ibn al-Athîr, 5:193; Ibn al-'Ibrî, 233; Ibn Kathîr, 10:249; Ibn Khaldûn, 3:532; al-Suyûṭî, 246; Ibn Khallikân, 3:269-70; Ibn al-'Imâd, 2:3.

80 Al-Khalîfa b. Khayyâṭ, 766; al-Ṭabarî, III:1030; al-Azdî, 352; al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûdj*, 3:441. Al-Mas'ûdî reports that it was said that 'Alî was either poisoned or died from indigestion. Both of these versions are also found in al-Iṣfahânî, *Maqâtil*, 565-7 and 571-2. The Shi'ite al-Ya'qûbî (*Ta'rîkh*, 2:453) reports that it was said that 'Alî al-Riḍâ was killed by the prominent Khurasanian 'Alî b. Hishâm who gave him a poisoned pomegranate to eat. Cf. also the opinion given by Ibn al-Athîr (5:193) who, after reporting the claims that al-Ma'mûn had poisoned 'Alî, states that he thinks this to be unlikely (*wa hâdhâ 'indî ba'îd*).

81 Al-Azdî, 352; al-Iṣfahânî, *Maqâtil*, 567; Miskawayh, 444; *Kitâb al-'uyûn*, 357; Ibn al-Athîr, 5:193; Ibn al-'Ibrî, 233; Ibn Kathîr, 10:249; Ibn Khallikân, 3:270; Ibn al-'Imâd, 2:6; al-Tha'âlibî, 117-8.

82 Al-Ya'qûbî, *Ta'rîkh*, 2:453; al-Azdî, 352; al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûdj*, 3:441; al-Iṣfahânî, *Maqâtil*, 567; al-Irbilî, 3:72; Ibn al-Athîr, 5:193; Ibn Kathîr, 10:249; Ibn Khallikân, 3:270; Ibn al-'Imâd, 2:6.

83 Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr, 263-3; al-Ṭabarî, III:1102-3; al-Azdî, 399; al-Ya'qûbî, *Ta'rîkh*, 2:454; Ibn al-Athîr, 5:219; Ibn Kathîr, 10:269; Ibn

Khaldûn, 3:544 and Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ârif*, 391, who, however, give the date as 210/825-6.

84 Ibn Kathîr, 10:269.

85 Al-Khalîfa, 767; Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr, 3-4 and 28; al-Ya'qûbî, *Ta'rîkh*, 2:453-4; al-Ṭabarî, III:1037-8; al-Maqdisî, 110; al-Azdî, 353; al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûdj*, 3:442-3; Ibn al-Athîr, 5:195; Ibn Ṭiqṭiqâ, 219; Ibn Kathîr, 10:250; Ibn Khaldûn, 3:533; Ibn al-Taghrîbirdî, 2:175; al-Suyûṭî, 247; al-Khaṭîb al-Baghdâdî, 10:184; Ibn Khallikân, 1:40; Ibn al-'Imâd, 2:3. Miskawayh, 447-8, and the *Kitâb al-'uyûn*, 358-9, supply the interesting detail that al-Ma'mûn ordered the change to black only after he was satisfied that his initial order (for change of color to green) had been duly heeded despite the resistance to it.

86 Though they differ on minor details, Gabrieli (1929) Daniel (1979, 181) and Hamdi (1956) take the view that the 'Alid-Ma'mûn relationships died away with the death of al-Riḍâ. Geddes (1963-4) agrees but dates the end of the relationship to 207/823, the year in which the rebellion in the Yemen by the 'Alid 'Abd al-Raḥmân was put down and the 'Alids were forbidden to enter the presence of al-Ma'mûn (al-Ṭabarî, III:1062-3) though the rebel leader was given a guarantee of safety (*amân*).

87 Ibn Ṭiqṭaqâ, 219; al-Suyûṭî, 247; Ibn al-'Imâd, 2:3.

88 Al-Ṭabarî, III:987.

89 "*'alâ sabîl al-i'tiqâl wa al-tawkîl*", al-Iṣfahânî, *Maqâtil*, 549. Of course, the caliph's action may also have been prompted by reality considerations leading to appease rather than to rock the boat.

90 Al-Djahshiyârî, 312; al-Iṣfahânî, *Maqâtil*, 563-4 and al-Ṣafadî, 657, say it was the fulfillment of a pledge made earlier by the caliph. Ibn al-Qiftî, 221-3, says that the designation was a sly decision of al-Ma'mûn's intended to undermine the popularity which the 'Alids enjoyed amongst the populace; the caliph wanted to show that they were by no means immune to worldly ambitions and pursuits.

91 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1139.

92 Madelung (1981, 346). For more on this theme see Abel (1935, especially pp. 8-9); Lewis (1950 especially p. 331); al-Dûrî (1981) and Madelung (1986).

93 That "Hâshimite" could include both 'Alids and 'Abbâsids see Nagel (1972, 70 ff., especially p. 80) and Madelung (1989b especially pp. 7-8). See also *EI2*, s.v. "Hâshimiyya" (B. Lewis). Cf. Crone (1980, 76).

94 Two points are worth noting. First, by such an assertion, al-Ma'mûn seems to have taken to heart Ibn al-Muqaffa"s counsel to his great-grandfather al-Mansûr (*Risâla fî al-ṣaḥâba*, 57) which stressed that the caliph's family ("*ahl baytihi*") included not only the 'Abbâsids but the

'Alids as well. Secondly, al-Ma'mûn's assertion in effect reversed al-Mahdî's moving away from the *waṣiyya*, a measure with which the 'Alids naturally had taken issue. The doctrine known as the *waṣiyya* (bequest) pertained to an early claim to legitimacy made by the 'Abbâsids and their partisans prior to and during the anti-Umayyad revolution. In it, the 'Abbâsids maintained that the imamate had been designated to a grandson of 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib, Abû Hâshim, but that he, in turn, had designated an 'Abbâsid as his successor. Under al-Mahdî, a new propagandistic meaning which left out the 'Alids was given to the *waṣiyya* doctrine. The new version was that the legitimate succession to the Prophet had been through al-'Abbâs and his descendants, not through 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib and his grandson. See Watt (1973, 154-5 and 1985, 33) and also *EI2* s.v. "*Kaysâniyya*" (W. Madelung) especially p. 837 b.

95 Bosworth (1987, 61) = al-Ṭabarî, III: 1013. Elaborated on in the complete designation text given by al-Irbilî, 3:124-5.

96 We have no concrete information on why al-Ma'mûn made this choice. It is a fact, however, that since al-Manṣûr, the appointment of al-Mu'taṣim was the first time an 'Abbâsid caliph chose as successor someone other than his own son. Al-Saffâḥ outlived his male descendants (Ibn Ḥazm, *Djamharat ansâb al-'arab*, 20) and therefore could not have passed the caliphate on to any of his sons. While al-Hâdî was succeeded by his brother, al-Rashîd, and al-Amîn by his brother, al-Ma'mûn, both of them had tried, but unsuccessfully, to place their sons on the throne.

Notes to Chapter Five

1 In Ṣafwat, 377-97. Also found in Rifâ'î (1927, 3:26-37 with very minute editorial differences from Ṣafwat's version). Ṣafwat's note (p. 377) on this *risâla* ("epistle") translates as follows: "The early 'Abbâsid caliphs charged their most eloquent clerks to compose the *risâlat al-khamîs* in support of their cause (*al-da'wa al-'abbâsiyya*) and of their claim that the sons of the Prophet's uncle al-'Abbâs and his descendants have the first priority in inheriting Muḥammad's caliphate. Each *risâla* urged support also for the ruling caliph, enumerated and lauded his attributes and legitimized his personal status as caliph. The caliphs used to dispatch the *risâla* to Khurasan where it was read to the throngs who gathered to hear it. Its dispatch to Khurasan itself symbolized the ruling caliph's appreciation for past Khurasani support and a prod to renewal of their allegiance and partiality to the 'Abbâsids. The first of these *risâla*s was composed for al-Manṣûr. The *risâla* under considera-

tion [on behalf of al-Ma'mûn] was composed by the eloquent Aḥmad b. Yûsuf, a clerk (*kâtib*) in al-Faḍl b. Sahl's office in Khurasan. It relates the support for the 'Abbâsid *da'wa*, praises al-Ma'mûn and justifies the overthrow of al-Amîn..." The letter was probably written in 198/813-4, some time after the death of al-Amîn. For more specifics on the "genre" of *risâlat al-khamîs* see Arazi and El'ad (1988) who also include a French translation of al-Ma'mûn's *risâlat al-khamîs*. Cf. Nagel (1975, 140 ff.) who gives an analysis of the *risâla*.

2 The text used here is the version given by al-Irbilî, 3:123 ff. The designation by al-Ma'mûn appears in English in Crone and Hinds (1986, as Appendix 4, 133-9). Crone and Hinds based their translation on al-Qalqashandî's *Ṣubḥ al-a'shâ* and Sibṭ b. al-Djawzî, *Mir'ât al-zamân* (using this last-mentioned manuscript's variations as given by Gabrieli in the footnotes to his Italian translation [1929, 38-43]). There are some very minor and inconsequential differences in the Arabic texts of al-Qalqashandî and al-Irbilî.

3 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1112-7.

4 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1117-21.

5 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1136-40.

6 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1137.

7 Al-Irbilî, 3:124.

8 Ṣafwat, 426-7.

9 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1117.

10 Somewhat removed from the immediate context which concerns us here is another episode in which all the 'Abbâsid caliphs are referred to by a poet as God's representatives. The poem in question is recorded by al-Iṣfahânî in his *Kitâb al-aghânî*, 19:331.

11 Al-Balâdhurî, 37.

12 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1112. The claim of having been made the recipient of the heritage of prophethood ("*...wa mawârîth al-nubuwwa allatî awrathahum*") seems extravagant indeed. Sourdel (1962, 44) and others interpret this as one of the indications that al-Ma'mûn was the first 'Abbâsid caliph to make such a claim of authority and in doing so resembled a Shi'ite *imâm* (see 4.2.). Pointing to references from, amongst others, al-Iṣfahânî, *Aghânî* and Ibn al-Qalânisî, *Dhayl ta'rîkh Dimashq*, Goldziher (1981, 183, n. 43), however, maintains that this manner of expression was a favorite one amongst the 'Abbâsid caliphs. If one accepts Goldziher's statement, this would mean that al-Ma'mûn was no exception in using this expression. Addressing themselves to the spirit, not the letter, of the expression being discussed, Crone and Hinds (1986) go even further by arguing that from the very beginning of the caliphate through to the Umayyads and early 'Abbâsids the self-

perception of the caliph as the supreme spiritual leader was the rule rather than the exception.

13 Ṣafwat, 426-7.
14 Al-Irbilî, 3:124-5.
15 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1112-3.
16 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1113.
17 Ṣafwat, *Risâlat al-khamîs*, 383 ff. and al-Irbilî, 3:124-5.
18 Ṣafwat, *Risâlat al-khamîs*, 383 ff.
19 Ṣafwat, *Risâlat al-khamîs*, 385.
20 Al-Irbilî, 3:125. See also Ibn Bâbawayh, 2:138-9; Miskawayh, 435-6.
21 Al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûdj*, 4:332-4; al-Ṭabarî, III:1112; Ṣafwat, *Letter to al-Ḥasan b. Sahl*, 426-7.
22 Al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûdj*, 4:332-4.
23 Al-Irbilî, 3:124-5.
24 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1117.
25 Al-Balâdhurî, 37.
26 Al-Balâdhurî, 33.
27 Al-Irbilî, 3:124-5.
28 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1137.
29 Al-Ya'qûbî, *Ta'rîkh*, 2:438; al-Irbilî, 3:124-5; al-Ṭabarî, III:1117 and 1138-9.
30 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1138.
31 Al-Irbilî, 3:124-5.
32 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1138.
33 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1138.
34 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1117; Miskawayh, 447-8; *Kitâb al-'uyûn*, 358-9; al-Irbilî, 3:124-5; Ibn Kathîr, 10:250-1.
35 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1126.
36 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1125.
37 Al-Djahshiyârî, 315-6.
38 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1117.
39 Ṣafwat, *Risâlat al-khamîs*, 383 ff.
40 Ṣafwat, *Risâlat al-khamîs*, 383 ff.; al-Irbilî, 3:124-5; al-Ṭabarî, III:1117. And, from a passage in al-Ya'qûbî (*Mushâkalat*, 28), we learn also that the caliph was no less concerned about the need to contribute to the advancement of secular learning as well.
41 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1132.
42 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1116.
43 Al-Ṭabarî III:1112-3.
44 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1126.
45 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1116.
46 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1131-2.

47 Al-Ṭabarî III:1132.
48 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1116.
49 Bosworth (1987, 200) = al-Ṭabarî, III:1113.
50 Bosworth (1987, 202) = al-Ṭabarî, III:1114.
51 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1115-6.
52 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1120.
53 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1120.
54 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1125-31.
55 It is true that one cannot expect the fourth letter to conform to the style in which al-Ma'mûn wrote to al-Amîn (then a caliph) even though he was furious at his brother's unprovoked betrayal; nor does one expect to encounter in a *miḥna* order that tenderness and poetic elegance one sees for instance in a letter he wrote to Zubayda, since the circumstances were different and she was his 'Abbâsid step-mother after all. It is perfectly understandable that the fourth letter, indeed all the *miḥna* letters, would not be a match to other letters in which the caliph sought to woo potential allies or gain their favor. Still, the fourth letter stands out as an oddity when compared with anything that was penned by or for al-Ma'mûn. It is also an oddity in that it violates everything we know about the caliph's presentation of himself. Al-Ma'mûn had always maintained decorum and he did not hesitate to defer to the opinions of others, inferiors included, when theirs made more sense than his own as we have seen in the previous chapter.
56 "*kharîṭa bundâriyya*" (al-Ṭabarî, III:1130). The Persian "*bundâr*" means here "rapid courier" (al-Ṭabarî, *Glossarium*, cxli-cxlii; cf. Bosworth 1987, 220, n. 678).
57 Bosworth (1987, 205) = al-Ṭabarî, III:1116-7.
58 Allowing for some speculation, the caliph's proximity to the Byzantine empire may have led him to learn that Theophilus (ruled 829-42 A.D.) was at the time taking determined steps against idolaters in his empire (Vasiliev 1964, 286). This knowledge may have given him the impetus to do a similar "cleaning up" job at home.
59 Humphreys (1991, 187 ff.); cf. Lapidus (1975). For the position of the *'ulamâ'* in society at the time see Cohen (1970).
60 Argued similarly by Crone (1980, 258, n. 608) who is additionally of the opinion that the only other important issue open to al-Ma'mûn at the time was the determinism/free will debate – a theme which, however, would far too easily lead to ambiguity. By this Crone means that "... free will and divine omnipotence may be compatible to theologians, but the doctrines whereby this compatibility is achieved never make simple shibboleths." Stated differently, had al-Ma'mûn used the free will/determinism issue as a touchstone, he would have opened

Pandora's box since there are numerous verses in the Koran which can be interpreted as supporting the idea of free will and many others which support determinism.

61 The caliph made such a link on numerous occasions in his correspondence to his governor who was in turn instructed to convey the message to opponents. The following is a sampling. In the third letter, al-Ma'mûn wrote that those who did not hold the view that the Koran was created "lay themselves open to the risk of rejecting God's own creative power ... [and] His primordial existence" (Bosworth 1987, 206 = al-Ṭabarî, III:1118). Later on in the same letter, al-Ma'mûn described those who denied the doctrine as men who did not have "any share in the true religion, nor any part in the real faith and the certainty of revealed truth" (Bosworth 1987, 208 = al-Ṭabarî, III:1120). In the fourth letter, disbelief in the doctrine was equated with "anthropomorphism ... unalloyed infidelity and sheer polytheism" (Bosworth, 214 and 216 = al-Ṭabarî, III:1125-6). Repeatedly the caliph stressed that a denial of the doctrine was a direct violation of the belief in God's oneness.

62 As we saw in Chapter Four, Abû Ḥanîfa had employed this argument, too.

63 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1124. Reference was made to Koranic verse 43:2.

64 On this concept in general see Goldziher (1906); for its meaning amongst the Twelver Shi'ites, see Kohlberg (1975).

65 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1123.

66 Cf. Lapidus (1975, 379); Crone and Hinds (1986, 93-6).

67 On "*ḥashwiyya*" see Houtsma (1912) and Halkin (1934).

68 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1112-13.

69 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1113.

70 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1126.

71 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1125.

72 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1118.

73 On this term, see *EI2*, s.v. "*mulḥid*" (W. Madelung).

74 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1119.

75 Bosworth (1987, 208) = al-Ṭabarî, III:1119.

76 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1115.

77 Bosworth (1987, 202) = al-Ṭabarî, III:1114.

78 Bosworth (1987, 216) = al-Ṭabarî, III:1127.

79 Bosworth (1987, 199-200) = al-Ṭabarî, III:1112.

80 Bosworth (1987, 202) = al-Ṭabarî, III:1114.

81 Bosworth (1987, 205-6) = al-Ṭabarî, III:1117.

82 Bosworth (1987, 202) = al-Ṭabarî, III:1114.

83 Contrary to both Sourdel (1962, especially p. 44) and 'Umar (1977, 111 ff.) who state that a caliph had never before assumed such authority for himself.

84 The current translation of *shâhid* is "witness", a term that falls short of reflecting the functions of the *shâhid* at the time of al-Ma'mûn. *Shuhûd* is discussed in 5.3.5.3.

85 Al-Ṭabarî, III:1120.

86 Bosworth (1987, 215) = al-Ṭabarî, III:1125.

87 Bosworth (1987, 209) = al-Ṭabarî, III:1120.

88 His name was found in Ibn Khallikân, 2:56-7.

89 Contrary to Lapidus (1975, 380) who implies a Khurasanian common denominator.

90 Various reports on the identity of the first judge in Islam are found in Juynboll (1983, 77-8).

91 In preparing the statement about the courts and their functionaries, I drew on: Juynboll (1983, 77-95), Humphreys (1991, 209-27), *EI2* "*kâḍî*" (E. Tyan) and "*fiḳh*" (J. Schacht), *EI1* "*shâhid*" (W. Heffening), Makdisi (1981), Cahen (1970) and Amedroz (1910). For a list of judges in Baghdad see Massignon (1948) and in al-Baṣra see Sourdel (1955).

92 On this process, see Schacht (1964, 23-56) and Coulson (1964, 36-52).

93 Makdisi (1981, 146).

94 Note in this context the importance assumed by "Prophetic *sunna*" (instead of "living *sunna*") which had been introduced by al-Shâfi'î (d. 204/820) as an increasingly important source for Islamic law (see Schacht 1964, 59-60).

95 Cf. Crone and Hinds (1986, 90-92).

96 Bosworth (1987, 214) = al-Ṭabarî, III:1125.

97 Al-Khaṭîb al-Baghdâdî, 14:180.

98 Bosworth (1987, 205) = al-Ṭabarî, III:1116-7.

CHRONOLOGICAL INFORMATION, BY GENRE, ON THE COMPILERS OF THE SOURCES USED

Ta'rîkh

Name of compiler; Year of his death; Work(s) used	Information about the chroniclers and their orientations, and source of information.
1. al-Khalîfa b. Khayyât; 240 A.H./854 A.D.; *Ta'rîkh*.	Not much is known about this chronicler, genealogist and *muḥaddith*; lived probably all his life in al-Baṣra where he was born. His works reflect 'Uthmânî tendencies. His *Ta'rîkh* is probably the oldest surviving *ta'rîkh*-work we have. •Source: *EI2*, "Ibn Khayyât al-'Uṣfûrî" (S. Zakkar).
2. al-Azraqî; 244/852; *Akhbâr Makka wa mâ djâ'a fîhâ min al-âthâr*.	Historian of Mecca. His family had risen to power under the Umayyads and married into this dynasty. The traditions used by al-Azraqî go back to the school of Ibn 'Abbâs and represent his doctrine. •Source: *EI2*, s.n. (J.W. Fück).
3. Ibn Ḥabîb; 245/860; *Kitâb al-Muḥabbar*.	Philologist. Few details are known about his life. In his time he was considered a reliable scholar in matters of poetry, genealogy and history. Generally speaking, his main authority is Ibn al-Kalbî. •Source: *EI2*, s.n. (I. Lichtenstädter).
4. Ṣâliḥ b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal; 265/878; *Sîrat Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*.	Son of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal who raised and educated him. Ṣâliḥ was born in Baghdad. He was a judge and appointed as such in Isfahan where he died. •Source: al-Ziriklî, 3:188.
5. Ḥanbal b. Isḥâq b. Ḥanbal; 273/886; *Dhikr miḥnat al-imâm Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*.	Paternal cousin of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and his pupil. Memorizer (*ḥâfiz*) of *ḥadîth*. Died in Wâsiṭ. •Source: al-Ziriklî, 2:286.

6. Ibn Qutayba; 276/889; *Kitâb al-ma'ârif.*

A theologian and writer of *adab*; a Sunnite polygragh. Born in al-Kûfa. He enjoyed a favored position at the caliphal court after al-Mutawakkil abandoned Mu'tazilism for mainstream Sunnite orthodoxy. He was given some official appointments and became judge in Dînawar. His work at hand is encyclopedic in scope and deals with many topics.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (G. Lecomte).

7. Ibn Qutayba (see directly above); *'Uyûn al-akhbâr.*

The work at hand is "a large compendium of *adab*, on a number of apparently secular subjects."
•Source: as above.

8. Ibn Qutayba (Pseudo-); (date unknown); *Kitâb al-imâma wa al-siyâsa.*

This work, a concise history of Islam, ends with the difficulties between al-Amîn and al-Ma'mûn.

9. al-Fasawî; 277/890; *Kitâb al-ma'rifa wa al-ta'rîkh.*

Considered to be a prominent memorizer (*ḥâfiẓ*) of *ḥadîth*. Came from Fasâ (in Fârs). He is said to have transmitted on the authority of around 1.000 shaykhs. He died in al-Baṣra.
•Source: al-Ziriklî, 8:198.

10. al-Balâdhurî; 279/892; *Futûḥ al-buldân.*

One of the most important historians of the 3rd/9th century. There are very few details on his life and even the years of his birth and death are uncertain. He spent most of his life in or around Baghdad where he had contacts with, amongst others, the historians Ibn Sa'd and al-Madâ'inî. He was a boon companion of al-Mutawakkil. He is praised for his critical mind and reliability. The work at hand is one of the most important sources on the conquests by Islam.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (C.H. Becker-F. Rosenthal).

11. Ibn Abî Ṭâhir Ṭayfûr; 280/893; *Kitâb Baghdâd.*

Man of letters and historian of Baghdad. Born to a family of Persian origin. Of his larger History of Baghdad —the work used here— the only extant part is on the reign of al-Ma'mûn. As a source, it is important due to its early date, the inclusion of documents and the compiler's eye for details and information on cultural aspects. There is a resemblance to al-Ṭabarî's version of al-Ma'mûn's

reign.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (F. Rosenthal).

12. al-Dînawarî;
ca. 282/895;
Kitâb al-akhbâr al-ṭiwâl.

Scholar of Persian descent. He was interested in both Hellenistic learning (*ḥikmat al-falsafa*) and Arabic humanities and was also the composer of mathematical works which may explain his systematic approach. The only work of this writer which is extant is the one at hand. Despite its scholarly value this work was, for unknown reasons, never popular in the Arab world and al-Dînawarî is never called a historian. This book, written for entertainment, hinges on an Iranian perspective (e.g., Islam is introduced as invading Persia). This tendency may be due to the sources used by al-Dînawarî.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (B. Lewin).

13. al-Ya'qûbî;
284/897;
Ta'rîkh.

Spent his youth in Armenia and served under the Ṭâhirids until their fall, after which he went to Egypt. Though he has a Shi'ite tendency it never really affects his writings. Prominent is, however, his interest in astrology. He usually does not mention his sources.
•Source: *EI1*, s.n. (C. Brockelmann).

14. al-Ya'qûbî;
284/897;
(see directly above);
Mushâkalat al-nâs li-zamânihim.

This work is an essay which basically tries "to demonstrate the thesis that the principle of imitation was one of the most important factors in the development of Islamic civilization."
•Source: Millward 1964, 329.

15. al-Ṭabarî;
310/923;
Ta'rîkh al-rusul wa al-mulûk.

Commentator on the Koran and considered to be the foremost classical Arab historian. The *Ta'rîkh* is a history of the world. It is characterized by the compiler's style which simply presents the events without interpreting them. Al-Ṭabarî initially followed the Shâfi'î school then founded a school of his own, *al-Djarîriyya*, which remained close to the Shâfi'îtes. Of more importance is his break with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal whose authority he only accepted in *ḥadîth* but not in *fiqh*. The followers of Ibn Ḥanbal showed their anger toward al-Ṭabarî more than once.
•Source: *EI1*, s.n. (R. Paret).

16. al-Djahshiyârî; 331/942; *Kitâb al-wuzarâ' wa al-kuttâb.*

Born in al-Kûfa, he succeeded his father in becoming *ḥâdjib* (chamberlain) at the caliphal court and hence was politically active. He is best known for the work at hand which is a history of the *kuttâb* (secretaries) and viziers till 296/908; however, the extant version ends at the beginning of the reign of al-Ma'mûn. The work gives information on both the characters and intellectual capabilities as well as the administrative or political qualities of those discussed.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (D. Sourdel).

17. al-Tamîmî; 333/944-5; *Kitâb al-miḥan.*

Historian, poet, traditionist and Mâlikite jurist. Took part in a revolt against the (Shi'ite) Fâṭimids and died in prison. The work at hand is a compilation of "reports about assassinations, murders, revolts, Shî'î rebellions, Khârijî activities, flogging of scholars and religious leaders by unjust rulers, poisoning, persecutions of the pious by cruel governors, etc." (Kister 1975, 218).
•Source: *EI2*, "Abû 'l-'Arab" (Ch. Pellat).

18. al-Azdî; 334/946; *Ta'rîkh al-Mawṣil.*

Historian of Mosul. The history of this city was written within the broader context of the general events of his time. The work is "a highly creditable achievement of early Muslim historiography".
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (F. Rosenthal).

19. al-Mas'ûdî; 345/956; *Murûdj al-dhahab wa ma'âdin al-djawhar.*

Born in Baghdad. His family was of Kûfan descent. Possessed enormous intellectual curiosity which is apparent in his wide range of reading and writing as well as in the many journeys he undertook to several places. His compositions have a historical-geographical framework. He was sympathatic towards the members of the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*) and Twelver Shi'ism. The work at hand can be divided into two parts. The first part deals with "sacred" history up to the time of the Prophet and includes many countries. The second part is a history of Islam and scarcely goes beyond events in the Islamic lands. The *Murûdj* covers the period till the reign of al-Muṭî' (334/946).
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (Ch. Pellat).

20. al-Mas'ûdî;
(see directly above);
Kitâb al-tanbîh wa al-ishrâf.

Probably the last work of al-Mas'ûdî. It succinctly summarizes the main points of the author's other historical-geographical writings.
•Source: as above.

21. al-Kindî;
350/961;
Kitâb al-wulât wa al-quḍât.

Historian of Egypt. Essentially a local history, this work is also informative on legal institutions and practices. In the preserved texts, information on the governors ends in 334/946 and on the judges in 246/861.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (F. Rosenthal).

22. al-Maqdisî (a.k.a. al-Muqaddasî);
ca. 355/966;
Kitâb al-bad' wa al-ta'rîkh.

Very little is known about this writer's life. It is a history of the world, starting with the beginning of time, and has a philosophical overtone.
•Source: al-Ziriklî, 7:253.

23. al-Iṣfahânî;
356/967;
Maqâtil al-ṭâlibiyyîn wa akhbâruhum.

Historian, man of letters and poet. Of Arab descent and member of the Marwânid branch of the Umayyads. Yet he was a Shi'ite. The work here was written in 313/923 and is essentially a compilation of biographies of the descendants of Abû Ṭâlib ending with accounts on 70 of them who died during the reign of al-Muqtadir (who died in 320/932).
•Source: *EI2* "Abû 'l-Faradj al-Iṣbahânî", (M. Nallino).

24. Ibn Bâbawayh;
ca. 381/991;
'Uyûn akhbâr al-riḍâ.

Known as al-Ṣâdûq, he is considered by the Twelver Shi'ites to be one of their most prominent doctors and traditionists. It is said that he was born in answer to a prayer to the Hidden Imam – and Ibn Bâbawayh was proud of this origin. In 355/966 he went to Baghdad, probably from Khurasan, and later died in Rayy. He taught in Baghdad and entered debates on behalf of the (Shi'ite) Bûyid Rukn al-dawla.
•Source: *EI2*, Ibn Bâbawayh(i), (A.A.A. Fyzee).

25. al-Shâbushtî;
388/998;
Kitâb al-diyârât.

Man of letters. Was affiliated with the ruler of Egypt who made him his librarian and boon companion. In this work he mentions each monastery in Iraq, the Shâm, al-Djazîra and Egypt. He died in Egypt.
•Source: al-Ziriklî, 4:325.

26. Sâwîris (Ibn al-Muqaffa'); sometime before 393-4/1003; *Ta'rîkh baṭâriqat al-kanîsa al-miṣriyya.*

Coptic monk. There is no biography of him. This history of the patriarchs is a very useful source for the history of Egypt and the Egyptian church as well as for Christianity in Nubia.
•Source: *EI2*, "Ibn al-Muqaffa'" (S.Y. Labib).

27. Miskawayh; 421/1030; *Tadjârib al-umam.*

Historian and philosopher. Was librarian and secretary of a number of viziers. He especially studied the History of al-Ṭabarî. His philosophical work (in which he stresses ethics) is more elaborate than his historical endeavors. The work at hand is a universal history from the Flood to the year 369/980 but only original in its last part on the Bûyids.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (M. Arkoun).

28. al-Ṣâbî; 448/1056; *Rusûm dâr al-khilâfa.*

Historian and secretary (*kâtib*). He converted to Islam at a late age. He came from Baghdad where he studied literature. He was put in charge of the chancellery (*dîwân al-inshâ'*) in Baghdad for a while. The book provides an overview of the proper rules at the caliphal court placed within a historical setting.
•Source: al-Ziriklî, 8:92.

29. Anonymous; Ca. end of the 5th/11th century; *Kitâb al-'uyûn wa al-ḥadâ'iq fî akhbâr al-ḥaqâ'iq.*

There is a close resemblance – at least for the reign of al-Ma'mûn – between this work and al-Ṭabarî's History.

30. Mârî b. Sulaymân; ca. 545/1150; *Commentaria.*

The first Nestorian to systematize theology as a whole. The chronicle used here is part of this theological encyclopedia entitled "*al-Midjdal li-al-istibṣâr wa al-djadal*" It contains the Arabic translation of older Nestorian works on history which have been lost and provides important material for the history of the caliphs of Baghdad.
•Source: Graf 1947, 2:200-2.

31. Michael the Syrian; 595-6/1199; *Chronique.*

Historian and liturgist. Jacobite patriarch of Antioch. Strong proponent of monophysitism. This work starts with the Creation and ends in the year 1195-6. It covers secular and church events and has a third section narrating miscellaneous events. The Seleucid

era is used for dating. "For the history of the twelfth century it is a most reliable source, ...".
•Source: *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, s.n. (K.H. Maksoudian).

32. Ibn al-Djawzî; 597/1200; *Manâqib al-imâm Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.*

A very prominent Baghdadi Ḥanbalite, he was a jurist, traditionist, historian and preacher. His career as a preacher started with the reign of al-Muqtafî (r. 530/1136-555/1160) whose vizier initiated a Sunnite revival. Ibn al-Djawzî championed Ḥanbalism not only in his sermons but also in his many writings. Toward the end of his life he fell in disgrace due to the fact that the new vizier was a Shi'ite.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (H. Laoust).

33. Ibn al-Athîr; 630/1233; *al-Kâmil fî al-ta'rîkh.*

Scholar and soldier who spent most of his adult life in Mosul. Fought in the armies of Ṣalâḥ al-Dîn. Though he wrote on other subjects, his greatest contribution is in history. This annalistic work deals with history from the beginning of the world to the year 628/1230-1; it "represents the high point of Muslim annalistic historiography. Distinguished by the well-balanced selection of its vast material, by its clear presentation, and by the author's occasional flashes of historical insight, it is somewhat marred, from the modern point of view, by its failure to indicate its sources and the restrictiveness of its annalistic form."
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (2), (F. Rosenthal).

34. Ibn al-Abbâr; 658/1260; *I'tâb al-kuttâb.*

Andalusian historian, traditionist, man of letters and poet. At one time he held the position of administrator but was dismissed due to his disobeying regulations. When the *amîr* al-Mustansir read a satire about him written by Ibn al-Abbâr he had the poet executed; his corpse and his works were burnt the next day. In one of his works, this author shows himself to be anti-Umayyad with possible Shi'ite tendencies. The title of the work at hand translates "The secretaries' contentment."
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (M. Ben Cheneb-Ch. Pellat).

35. Ibn al-'Ibrî (Latinized name: Bar Hebraeus); 681/1286; *Mukhtaṣar al-duwal.*

Historian and translator. His Jewish father was at one time physician of a Tatar general. He eventually became head of the Jacobite church in the east. He was known for his tolerance and energy in withstanding political and religious pressures. This work was written at the request of his Muslim friends and is the Arabic adaptation of a larger universal political history written in Syriac. He is not noted for originality but for his reliability in conveying, with fidelity, the contents of the sources he used.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (J.B. Segal).

36. al-Irbilî; 692/1293; *Kashf al-ghumma bi-ma'rifat al-a'imma.*

Prolific writer and poet. Worked, first, for the governor of Irbil then, in Baghdad, for the chancellery (*dîwân al-inshâ'*). Considered a reliable source by the Twelver Shi'ites.
•Sources: al-Ziriklî, 4:318-9 and the editor's Introduction to the book.

37. Ibn Ṭiqṭiqâ; 709/1309; *Kitâb al-fakhrî.*

Historian of Ḥasanid 'Alid descent. Like his father, he was an active agent (*naqîb*) of the 'Alid cause. He wrote his history of Islam for Fakhr al-dîn b. 'Îsâ b. Ibrâhîm of Mosul. "The work consists of a brief *Fürstenspiegel* and biographies of the caliphs down to al-Mu'taṣim, followed in each case by biographies of the viziers of the caliph ... The author's skilful choice of his largely anecdotal material, his reflective rather than factual approach to history, and the obvious love for his subject of an urbane and literate personality combine to make the *Fakhrî* enjoyable and instructive reading to a degree uncommon in medieval scholarly historiography."
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (F. Rosenthal).

38. al-Dhahabî; 748/1348; *Tarjamat al-imâm Aḥmad* (an abridgement from his *Ta'rîkh al-Islâm*).

Historian and theologian. His main interests were Tradition and law. A Shâfi'ite who spent a great part of his life in Cairo. "Like practically all the post-classical Arab authors he too was a compiler, but his works are distinguished by careful composition and constant references to his authorities." The *Ta'rîkh al-Islâm* is a large history of Islam till the year 700/1300-1. It is divided into seventy classes (*ṭabaqât*) which, after a general introduction, are mainly

organized by obituary notices. For the first three centuries of Islam it can be considered a short compendium of al-Ṭabarî's History.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (Moh. Ben Cheneb-J. de Somogyi).

39. Ibn Kathîr; 774/1373; *al-Bidâya wa al-nihâya.*

Historian and traditionist. Syrian Ḥanbalite and pupil of al-Dhahabî. He once took part in the inquiry of an "unbeliever" (*zindîq*) who was accused of incarnationism (*ḥulûl*); later he was a member of a council which condemned a Shi'ite to death for cursing the first three caliphs as well as Mu'âwiya and Yazîd. The work at hand is a history of Islam; for the caliphate his sources, were amongst others, al-Ṭabarî, Ibn al-Djawzî, Ibn al-Athîr and al-Dhahabî. It is a principal source for the Mamlûk period.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (H. Laoust).

40. Ibn Khaldûn; 808/1406; *Kitâb al-'ibar* (which includes the *Muqaddima*).

North-African historian, "sociologist" and philosopher. The introduction (*muqaddima*) to his universal history (*al-'ibar*) is Ibn Khaldûn's philosophy of history. The work at hand is much more useful for the history of the western part of the Islamic world (especially the history of the Berbers) than the eastern; at times the writer is not accurate with details.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (M. Talbi).

41. Ibn al-Taghrîbirdî; 874/1470; *al-Nudjûm al-zâhira fî mulûk miṣr wa al-qâhira.*

Historian of Egypt. Had a military career before he wrote history. This work is a history of Egypt. It commences in the year 20/641 and continues till the writer's own time – written, so he tells us, for his friends and especially the Mamlûk sultan's son.
•Source: *EI2*, "Abû 'l-Maḥâsin Taghrîbirdî" (W. Popper).

42. al-Suyûṭî; 911/1505; *Ta'rîkh al-khulafâ'.*

A writer on a large number of Islamic subjects. With regard to this work, its strength is not originality but the conciseness of its narrative.
•Source: Jarrett 1970 (Translator's Introduction).

Ṭabaqât

43. Ibn Sa'd;
230/845;
Kitâb al-ṭabaqât al-kabîr.

Traditionist and client (*mawlâ*) of the Hâshimites. Originally from al-Basra, he traveled far and studied under several authorities. He was one of the seven men who were ordered to be brought to al-Ma'mûn in order that the caliph would secure their acquiescence in the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran. The work used here is a collection of information on more than 4000 people who participated in narrating traditions. Preceded by a biography of the Prophet, the entries are arranged geographically. Unlike his teacher al-Wâqidî, Ibn Sa'd has the reputation of being a trustworthy transmitter usually giving a complete *isnâd* (chain of transmitters).
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (J.W. Fück).

44. Wakî';
306/918;
Akhbâr al-quḍât wa tawârîkhihim.

Judge, historian and geographer. He was judge of al-Ahwâz; died in Baghdad. This work is a history of judges arranged by geographical area.
•Source: al-Ziriklî, 6:114-5.

45. Abû Nu'aym al-Iṣfahânî;
430/1038;
Ḥilyat al-awliyâ' wa ṭabaqât al-aṣfiyâ'.

Authority on law (*fiqh*) and mysticism (*taṣawwuf*); Shâfi'ite. His grandfather was the first of his family to become a Muslim. For a while Abû Nu'aym al-Iṣfahânî was considered one of the best tradition scholars of his time. He was physically attacked due to frictions between the Hanbalites and Shâfi'ites in his hometown Iṣfahân. The work at hand was finished in 422/1031 and is essentially a collection of the deeds and sayings of about 650 pious people (*nussâk*) beginning with the first four caliphs of Islam.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (J. Pedersen).

46. al-Khaṭîb al-Baghdâdî;
463/1071;
Ta'rîkh Baghdâd.

Shâfi'ite scholar of tradition and law and a preacher in Baghdad. He changed from being a Hanbalite (like his father) to a Shâfi'ite. The Hanbalites were at the time influential in Baghdad, and al-Khaṭîb was subjected to their hostility; he responded by making occasional disparaging remarks about Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and his followers. Had to flee to Damascus where he lived for a number of years. He was almost executed by the Fâṭimid governor of Damascus for making some Shi'ites angry. He died in Baghdad. The

work used here is an encyclopedic collection of about 7800 entries on people who had played some political or social role in Baghdadi life. The work's scope of information far exceeded its writer's intent of providing some essentials for *ḥadîth* scholars. "The arrangement and contents of the biographies, set down in a not strictly alphabetical order, show also that a traditionist rather than a biographer has been at work."
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (R. Sellheim).

47. Ibn Abî Ya'lâ; 526/1131; *Ṭabaqât al-ḥanâbila.*

Historian and Ḥanbalite jurist (*faqîh*). Born in Baghdad where he was also killed by some men who were after his money. As its title suggests, the *ṭabaqât* is a compendium about the Ḥanbalites. (See entry 68 about Ibn al-Farrâ' who was Ibn Abî Ya'lâ's father and of a different orientation.)
•Source: al-Ziriklî, 7:23.

48. Yâqût; 626/1229; *Mu'djam al-udabâ' (Irshâd al-arîb ilâ ma'rifat al-adîb).*

Trustworthy historian, geographer, scholar of grammar and literature. Originally a Byzantine captured by the Muslims and later released by his master. He earned a living by copying books. Traveled to many places. The work at hand is a collection of biographies of important men of learning.
•Source: al-Ziriklî, 8:131.

49. Ibn al-Qiftî; 646/1248; *Ta'rîkh al-ḥukamâ'.*

Arab writer, born in Egypt and at one time head of the *dîwân* of finances of the Atabeg of Aleppo. He probably used this position in order to pursue his scholarly interests. This work has 414 biographies of physicians, philosophers and astronomers. It is also of value due to its use of Greek works which have not survived in their original form.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (A. Dietrich).

50. Ibn Khallikân; 681/1282; *Wafayât al-a'yân wa anbâ' abnâ' al-zamân.*

A biographer and scholar of the Shâfi'ite persuasion. Born in Irbil, traveled to amongst other places Mosul, Damascus and Egypt. He met the historian Ibn al-Athîr. He was appointed judge of Syria by the Mamlûk sultan Baybars but had a disappointing career. His work centers on people who had gained fame for some reason or another. Only those people whose year of death was known were included in the

alphabetically-arranged work. "This book, intended by its author as a historical compendium, is a mine of information, especially in those parts where he speaks of contemporaries, whilst in the articles on men of earlier times he often quotes sources which are either lost or not yet published".
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (J.W. Fück).

51. al-Dhahabî; (see no. 38 above); *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffâẓ.*

The work at hand is a compendium for evaluating transmitters of *ḥadîth*.

52. al-Dhahabî; (see no. 38 above); *Mîzân al-i'tidâl.*

A compendium for helping to evaluate the transmission of *ḥadîth*.

53. al-Ṣafadî; 764/1363; *al-Wâfî fî al-wafayât.*

Man of letters and historian. Originally from Ṣafad, he studied in Damascus where he died. He has about 200 works to his name, including the biographical dictionary used here, which is still being published.
•Source: al-Ziriklî, 2:315-6.

54. al-Subkî; 771/1370; *Ṭabaqât al-shâfi'iyya.*

Historian, scholar and judge of the Shâfi'ite persuasion. Born in Cairo but moved with his father to Damascus. Some of his fellow judges in Damascus accused him of unbelief and he was brought in chains to Cairo. He was released, however, and returned to Damascus where he died of the plague.

55. Ibn al-Murtaḍâ; 840/1437; *Ṭabaqât al-mu'tazila.*

The writer is a Zaydite *Imâm* who held this post from 793/1390-1 till 794/1391-2. Though the work is relatively late, it is still considered an important and original source on the Mu'tazilites.

56. Ibn Ḥadjar al-'Asqalânî; 852/1449; *Tahdhîb al-tahdhîb.*

"Egyptian *ḥadîth* scholar, judge, and historian ..., whose life work constitutes the final summation of the science of *ḥadîth* and makes him one of the greatest and, at the same time, most typical representatives of Muslim religious scholarship." It was at the age of 23 that he decided to specialize in the study of *ḥadîth*. A Shâfi'ite, his interest in religious learning was typical of the Muslim higher middle class of the time. Most of the material he used was from older sources, and he aimed at thoroughness and completeness.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (F. Rosenthal).

57. Ibn Ḥadjar al-'Asqalânî (see directly above); *Lisân al-Mîzân.*

This work gives information on men associated with transmitting *hadîth* but who are not in the canonical collections.

58. Ibn al-'Imâd; 1089/1679; *Shadharât al-dhahab fî akhbâr man dhahab.*

A scholar of the Ḥanbalite school. The work at hand is basically an annalistic biographical history whose entries are usually arranged according to the year of death of the men surveyed. It covers the period from the year 1 of the Islamic calendar until 1000. This work was written for scholars who could not afford more elaborate and expensive works. "...useful as a preliminary source of information... ".
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (F. Rosenthal).

Adab

59. Ibn 'Abdrabbihi; 328/940; *al-'Iqd al-farîd.*

Andalusian writer and poet, born in Cordova where he also died. At one time court poet. His book can "be considered as a sort of encyclopaedia of the knowledge which is useful to a well-informed man and as a more or less successful attempt at orderly classification of the notions which constitute culture ...". Though its writter is an Andalusian, the book presents information that is restricted to the region of the Middle East.
•Source: *EI2*, "Ibn 'Abd Rabbih" (C. Brockelmann).

60. al-Iṣfahânî; 356/967; see above no. 23.; *Kitâb al-aghânî.*

This is a collection of songs and poems which also gives information on those who composed them. "In one word, in the *Aghânî* we pass in review the whole of Arabic civilization from the *djâhiliyya* [pre-Islamic times] down to the end of the 3rd/9th century."
•Source: See above.

61. al-Tanûkhî; 384/994; *Nishwâr al-muḥâdara wa akhbâr al-mudhâkara.*

Man of letters and judge. Born and raised in al-Baṣra. His adult life was spent in Baghdad where he died. The book is a collection of anecdotes.
•Source: al-Ziriklî, 2:288.

62. al-Tha'âlibî; 429/1038; *Laṭâ'if al-ma'ârif.*

Writer of literature and history. Came from Nîsâbûr. His name of affiliation (*nisba*) is derived from the fact that he was a furrier who sewed the hides of foxes. He wrote a great number of entertaining and enjoyable books of which the *Laṭâ'if* is one.
•Source: al-Ziriklî, 4:163-4.

Theoretical works

63. al-Djâḥiz; 255/868-9; *Rasâ'il.*

Baṣran man of letters who wrote on Mu'tazilite theology and politico-religious polemics. His writings on theology were devoted to reconciling faith and reason; on politics he dealt with the nature of the caliphate. He never held an official appointment, but he was revered due, amongst others things, to al-Ma'mûn's praise of him. Of his *Rasâ'il* (essays), the *'Uthmâniyya* is the largest. It deals with the legitimacy of the first three caliphs of Islam and it attacks the assertions of the Shi'ites. Politically, al-Djâḥiz was a Mu'tazilite apologist of the 'Abbâsids — and their ascendancy — against pro-Umayyad groups in particular the "*Nâbita*", the *Shu'ûbiyya* (Muslims who denied that the Arabs had a privileged position in Islam) and the Shi'ites. He had Mu'tazilite followers of his own but his school was hardly mentioned as such.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (Ch. Pellat).

64. al-Khayyât; ca. 300/913; *Kitâb al-intiṣâr.*

Theologian and jurist who was a prominent Mu'tazilite of the Baghdadi school. The book at hand is a refutation of an attack by a renegade Mu'tazilite. It was probably finished around 269/822.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (J. van Ess).

65. al-Nawbakhtî; 310/922; *Firaq al-shî'a.*

Astrologer who had some knowledge of philosophy. Of Persian descent (as his name suggests) but he lived in Baghdad. He was attracted to both Shi'ism and Mu'tazilism. This work is an early account of the different Shi'ite sects.
•Source: al-Ziriklî, 2:224.

66. al-Baghdâdî;
429/1037;
al-Farq bayn al-firaq.

Teacher of theology, law and mathematics among others. Lived in Nîsâbûr. Shâfi'ite whose work here is a polemic directed against all non-orthodox sects. "It is fair to say that he draws from doctrines, which he condemns, conclusions never envisaged by their authors."
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (A.S. Tritton).

67. al-Mâwardî;
450/1058;
Kitâb al-aḥkâm al-sulṭâniyya.

Shâfi'ite jurist. Judge of Baghdad where he died. He served also two caliphs (al-Qâdir and al-Qâ'im) who endeavored to restore strict Sunnism. The work used here is considered a classic on public law.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (C. Brockelmann).

68. Ibn Ḥazm;
456/1064;
Kitâb al-faṣl fî al-milal.

Andalusian poet, historian, jurist, philosopher and theologian. Ẓâhirite (one who interprets the Koran literally). The work at hand is a major study of religions which had anything to do with Islam and includes a discussion of the various Islamic sects. It is considered to be complete and correct and hence a sound historical source.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (R. Arnaldez).

69. Ibn al-Farrâ';
458/1066;
al-Aḥkâm al-sulṭâniyya.

Ḥanbalite judge in Baghdad known also under the name Abû Ya'lâ. At one time he was vehemently attacked by some Shâfi'ite theologians who accused him of anthropomorphism. He was on a council which had the task of stating official caliphal doctrine especially concerning the nature of God and the uncreated status of the Koran. (His son is the composer of a *ṭabaqât* work on the Ḥanbalites, see no. 47.) The title used here is about public law.
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (H. Laoust).

70. al-Shahrastânî;
548/1153;
Kitâb al-milal wa al-niḥal.

Philosopher of Islam from, as his name suggests, Shahrastân, who died in Baghdad. Knowledgeable in the sects of philosophy and theology, speculative theology (*kalâm*) and religions. This work is an exposé of the doctrine of various philosophies, religions and Islamic sects.
•Source: al-Ziriklî, 6:215.

Other works

71. Ibn al-Nadîm; 385/995; *Kitâb al-fihrist.*

Little is known of his life. He possibly made a living selling books. He was interested in philosophy and the sciences. A Shi'ite, probably of the Twelver creed. By his own account this work, which is basically a list of known books, was completed in 377/987-8. "Being the work of an Imâmî author, the *Fihrist* contains statements offensive to an orthodox reader, e.g., the claim that the Prophet received the Mu'tazilî doctrine through divine revelation."
•Source: *EI2*, s.n. (J.W. Fück).

Collections

72. Ṣafwat; *Ḏjamharat rasâ'il al-'arab.*

This is a compilation of important letters and documents of which Volumes III and IV – used in this study – include material relevant to the early 'Abbâsid period.

INFORMATION ON THOSE INTERROGATED

The columns in the Table with letters represent the following:

A. The seven men summoned by the caliph for personal interrogation as per his second letter.
B. The 26 men interrogated *en masse* by Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm and whose names are reported by al-Ṭabarî immediately following the third letter.
C. The 14 men whose names are cited by al-Ṭabarî – in his report which immediately follows the third letter – as having been individually interrogated by Isḥâq b. Ibrâhîm and about some of whom we only have the description of the actual *Miḥna* proceedings. (A comparison of columns B and C shows that nine of these 14 men were previously interrogated *en masse*, the other five presumably individually and for the first time.)
D. The 24 men who passed the review of the caliph in his fourth letter and of whom 16 (see column E) were reviled by him.
E. The 16 (of the 24 men listed in column D) whom al-Ma'mûn subjected to verbal assault on grounds of defective intellect [*(I)] or on grounds of personal integrity and character [*(P)].
F. The 21 men who were dispatched to Tarsus as reported by al-Ṭabarî immediately following the text of the fifth letter. (Two other men – Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Muḥammad b. Nûḥ, were also sent to Tarsus but on an earlier occasion – hence their names are not listed in column F.)
G. The final list of the 12 men who on no occasion are reported to have given their assent to the doctrine.
For those who did, see *(a), *(b), *(c) in the table;

a. Those who, according to al-Ṭabarî, gave assent – hence not sent to Tarsus (15 men).
b. Those who gave assent, yet sent to Tarsus (12 men).
c. Though al-Ṭabarî does not say so, these men may have given their assent as implied by their having been spared dispatch to Tarsus – which, judging by the caliph's orders, would not have been the case had they resisted (5 men).

Note that *al-*, *Ibn* (*b.*), and *Abû* (*Abî*) have been disregarded in the alphabetization.

No	Name	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Biographical information
1	'Abbâs, *mawlâ* of al-Ma'mûn				*(c)				A *mawlâ* (client) of al-Ma'mûn (al-Tabarî, III 1125), nothing else is known about him
2	'Abd al-A'lâ b Mushir, Abû Mushir al-Dimashqî				*(a)				*Muhaddith* from whom, amongst others, Yahyâ b Ma'în (who was also interrogated) had transmitted, interrogated by al-Ma'mûn personally; from Damascus and very popular in it, Ibn Hanbal spoke highly of Abû Mushir and said that he was his teacher (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 11 72-5)
3	'Abd al-Mun'im b Idrîs			*(a)					*Muhaddith* who died in Baghdad (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 11 131-4)
4	'Abd al-Rahmân b Ishâq b Ibrâhîm b Salama al-Dabbî		*		*(c)				Influential judge (at the time of al-Ma'mûn) of western Baghdad, especially after the district of Bishr b al-Walîd al-Kindî (also interrogated)
5	Ahmad b Shudjâ'		*		*(b)	*(P)	*		Could not be identified
6	Ibn al-Ahmar			*(a)					Could not be identified Uhrig (1988, 271) suggests he was the son of the grammarian 'Alî b al-Mubârak, known as al-Ahmar, who died in 194/810
7	Ibn 'Alî b 'Âsim		*		*(b)	*(I)	*		Identity is uncertain He may be Muhammad or Abû 'Alî b 'Âsim or 'Âsim b Abî al-Husayn or 'Âsim b 'Alî b 'Âsim b Suhayb The last-named (the only one on whom information could be gained) was a highly popular *muhaddith* who transmitted in al-Rusâfa, members of the Ibn Hanbal family transmitted from him (including Ahmad) and the fellow-interrogee al-Qawârîrî He may have had contacts with Yahyâ b Ma'în —who was also interrogated— but the nature of the relationship is uncertain (could have been friendly or just the opposite) (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 12 247-50)
8	'Alî b Abî Muqâtil		*	*	*		*	*	Could not be identified

9	"al-A'mâ" (the blind man)			*(a)					"He was not a *faqîh*" (al-Tabarî, III:1124) nothing else is known about his identity.
10	Ibn al-Bakkâ' al-Akbar			*			*	*	Could not be identified; perhaps he was the brother of Ibn al-Bakkâ' al-Asghar who, as it appears from al-Tabarî's (III:1124) report, was an antagonist of Ibn Hanbal and who may have taken some part in the interrogation proceedings.
11	al-Bazzâz, Abû al-'Awwâm		*		*(b)	*(I)	*		A reliable *muhaddith* who transmitted from several men but transmitted only to his son; may have been a *mustamlî* (one who dictates traditions as a profession) of perhaps the father of Ibn 'Ulayya (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 5:227-8).
12	Bishr b. al-Walîd al-Kindî		*	*	*	*(I)	*	*	Judge since 208/823-4; studied *fiqh* under Abû Yûsuf (the chief judge under al-Rashîd); influential at the court of al-Ma'mûn; learned; a Hanafite opponent of the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran; rather a controversial figure (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 7:80-4).
13	Ibn Dâ'ûd, Ismâ'îl	*(a)							Could not be identified.
14	Ibn al-Dawraqî, Ahmad	*(a)							Transmitted from the famous Yazîd b. Hârûn; reliable traditionist; son of Ahmad b. Hanbal and many others transmitted from him (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 4:6-7).
15	al-Dhayyâl al-Haytham		*	*	*	*(P)	*	*	Could not be identified either under this name or the one given by Yâqût (9:18-24) as al-Dhayyâl *b.* al-Haytham.
16	al-Djawharî, 'Alî b. Dja'd		*				*	*	Traditionist with a long list of persons who transmitted from him. These include al-Bukhârî and, from amongst those interrogated, Ishâq b. Abî Isrâ'îl; portrayed as a courageous man, reflected in a narrative that he did not stand up – as all present did – when al-Ma'mûn left the room, justifying his action by a *hadîth* which impressed the caliph (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 11:360-6).

17	al-Fadl b Ghânım		*		*(b)	*(P)	*		From Marw; lived and died in Baghdad, traditionist who studied *hadîth* under numerous men and a larger number transmitted from him, was considered an authority on *hadîth* by the Egyptians, appointed judge (possibly chief judge) of Egypt by the territory's governor but dismissed after some 10 months (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 12 357-60)
18	Ibn al-Farrukhân		*		*(b)	*(P)	*		Could not be identified
19	Ibn Hanbal, Ahmad		*	*	*	*(I)		*	The famous *muhaddith* and founder of the school of law named (by others) after him
20	al-Hasanî, Dja'far b 'Îsâ				*				Judge, at one time (probably 210/825-6) appointed by al-Ma'mûn as judge of eastern Baghdad probably till at least 218/833-4 (Wakî', 3 273, al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 7 160-2)
21	Ibn al-Hırsh		*				*	*	Could not be identified, also not under Hırsh or Harsh as Yâqût ((9 18-24) has it
22	Ibrâhîm b al-Mahdî				*(c)				The paternal uncle of al-Ma'mûn who was installed in 202/817-8 as anti-caliph in the aftermath of the death of al-Amîn especially due to the 'Abbâsids' fear that the caliphate might be passed on to the 'Alids
23	Ishâq b Abî Isrâ'îl		*				*	*	Originally from Marw; transmitter (said to be reliable), amongst the many who transmitted from him are al-Bukhârî and 'Abdallâh, son of Ibn Hanbal (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 6 356-62)
24	Ismâ'îl b Abî Mas'ûd	*(a)							Traditionist, *kâtib* (clerk) of al-Wâqidî (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 6 250)
25	Ibn al-Mıskîn, al-Hârıth, Abû 'Umar							*	Reliable *muhaddith*, *faqîh*, transmitted in Baghdad to, amongst others, the son of Ibn Hanbal, jailed for his refusal to assent to the doctrine only to be released by al-Mutawakkil (Ibn Khallikân, 2 56-7, al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 8 216-8)
26	Muhammad b Hâtım b Maymûn		*		*(b)	*(P)	*		*Muhaddith* who had been a transmitter from amongst others Yahyâ b Hârûn and from whom Muslim was one of numerous transmitters, originally from Marw (al Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 2 266-8)

27	Muhammad b. Nûḥ al-Madrûb		*		*	*(P)		*	Famous amongst the *ahl al-sunna* though his *hadîth* was not extensive; had some kind of association with Ibn Hanbal He was sent along with Ibn Hanbal to Tarsus in fetters on the orders of al-Ma'mûn (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 3:322-3).
28	Muhammad b. Sa'd b. Manî' al-Basrî	*(a)							*Muhaddith* and famous historian, known under the name of Ibn Sa'd, born in al-Basra, *kâtib* (clerk) of al-Wâqidî; studied under more than six scholars, and three others transmitted from him, contacts with al-Qawârîrî, Yahyâ b Ma'în, and Ibn Hanbal (fellow interrogees) (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 5 321)
29	Abû Muslim	*(a)							*Mustamlî* (one who dictates traditions as a profession) of the famous Koranic commentator and traditionist Yazîd b. Hârûn; knew Sadjdjâda (another interrogee), possibly had contacts with Mansûr b. al-Mahdî (who had refused to take over as an anti-caliph against al-Ma'mûn) (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 13 342).
30	al-Muzaffar			*(a)					From Baghdad, possibly a *muhaddith* (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 13 126)
31	al-Nadr b. Shumayl		*				*	*	Possibly mistaken identity since *the* al-Nadr b Shumayl appears to have died 14 or 15 years before the *Miḥna* In any event, al-Nadr b Shumayl (who died in 203/818-9 or 204/819-20) was a traditionist and grammarian from al-Basra who lived in Marw and introduced the *sunna* to Khurasan; a *qâdî* of impeccable reputation (Juynboll 1983, 23 and 115; Ibn Hadjar, *Tahdhîb*, 10.390-1)
32	al-Qaṭî'î, Ismâ'îl b. Ibrâhîm, Abû Ma'mar		*		*(b)	*(P)	*		*Muhaddith* from whom al-Bukhârî and Muslim transmitted as did a son of Ibn Hanbal, of Khurasanian origin, there is no statement in al-Tabarî to indicate that he gave in, but according to al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, he did
33	al-Qawârîrî, 'Ubaydallâh b. Maysara		*	*	*(b)	*(P)	*		Basran who lived in Baghdad, involved in judicial activities (as implied in the fourth letter on the *Miḥna*); transmitted from and to many men including Ibn Hanbal and another man interrogated

34	Qutayba b. Sa'îd		*	*(a)					Traditionist who studied under numerous men and from whom a number of others have transmitted, Ibn Hanbal and another man interrogated (Zuhayr b. Harb) transmitted from him, also al-Bukhârî and Muslim transmitted from him (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 12.464-70).
35	Sa'dawayh, Sa'îd b Sulaymân		*		*b)	*(P)	*		Traditionist (reliable) who, according to al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, was of the *ahl al-sunna*; lived in Baghdad and transmitted there; list of those who transmitted from him is long and includes two men who were interrogated (Yahyâ b. Ma'în and Muhammad b Hâtim b. Maymûn) and a son of Sadjdjâda also transmitted from him, after consenting to the doctrine he described himself as *kâfir* (unbeliever) (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 9.84-7).
36	Sadjdjâda, al-Hasan b. Hammâd b. Ḳusayb		*		*(b)	*(P)	*		Traditionist, considered reliable and studied under and transmitted to numerous men, Hanafite; according to al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, he allegedly had a woman divorce her husband for having said that the Koran was created (a story thought possible by Ibn Hanbal) (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 7 295-6)
37	*Shaykh* from the progeny of 'Umar b. al-Khattâb		*	*(a)					All we know about him is narrated by al-Tabarî (III 1124) judge of al-Ṛaqqa, from the progeny of 'Umar b al-Khattâb
38	al-Sindî				*(c)				Possibly al-Sindî b. Yahyâ b Sa'îd al-Harashî, who was a former supporter of al-Amîn (Bosworth 1987, 17, n 37) and who was amongst those who officiated in the ceremony which declared al-Ma'mûn deposed and Ibrâhîm b al-Mahdî anti-caliph (al-Tabarî,III 1015-6)
39	al-Tammâr, Abû Nasr		*		*(b)	*(I)	*		*Muhaddith*, originally from Khurasan but lived in Baghdad throughout his life, very pious man; Muslim was amongst the many who transmitted from him (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 10 420-3)

40	Ibn 'Ulayya al-Akbar		*	*(a)					Identity uncertain. Not to be confused with the *mutakallim* Ibn 'Ulayya who was a proponent of the createdness of the Koran (contrary to Uhrig 1988, 265); see Van Ess (1991-, 2:420, n. 23) on the confusion between these two Ibn 'Ulayya's.
41	Yahyâ b. 'Abd al-Rahmân al-'Umarî		*		*(b)		*		Could not be identified under this name or the name given by Yâqût (9:18-24) as Yahyâ b. 'Abd al-Rahmân al-Ruyâshî, al-Tabarî's (III.1130) copy of the *Mihna* letters tells us that he may have claimed to be descended from 'Umar b al-Khattâb.
42	Yahyâ b. Ma'în	*(a)							Pious and important traditionist, *faqîh*, *'âlim* and *rijâl*-expert (that is, knowledge of reliability of *hadîth* transmitters). Ibn Hanbal, his son and grandson transmitted from him as did Muhammad b Sa'd, Zuhayr b Harb, Ibn al-Dawraqî (interrogees), al-Bukhârî, Muslim and Abû Dâ'ûd; he and Ibn Hanbal admired each other Very learned Ibn Hanbal considered him a most reliable *muhaddith* (Ibn Sa'd, 7 354, al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 14 177-87)
43	al-Ziyâdî, Abû Hassân		*	*	*	*(P)	*	*	Born in Baghdad and died in 242/856-7 or 243/857-8; judge and traditionist who is closely associated with al-Wâqidî (who died in 207/822-3); of Hanafite persuasion, opposed to the doctrine of the createdness of the Koran, frequently quoted by Ibn Abî Tâhir Tayfûr (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 7:356-61)
44	Zuhayr b. Harb, Abû Khaythama	*(a)							Traditionist; *'âlim* (al-Khatîb al-Baghdâdî, 8 482-4)

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SAMENVATTING

In het jaar 212 A.H./827 A.D. maakte de zevende 'Abbâsidische kalief al-Ma'mûn publiekelijk bekend dat de Koran was geschapen. Zes jaar daarna gelastte hij een soort inquisitie, die later bekend werd als de *miḥna*, om instemming met dit denkbeeld af te dwingen. Deze handelwijze van de kalief heeft de moderne westerse geleerden om twee redenen nogal bevreemd. Ten eerste was de uitvaardiging van een religieuze doctrine – en zeker één die met dwingende maatregelen aan de Gemeenschap werd opgelegd – een nieuwigheid in de Islam. Ten tweede was het handelen van de kalief niet in overeenstemming met het beeld dat wij van hem hebben. Al-Ma'mûn was immers een genaakbaar man die het intellect verheerlijkte en in het streven naar waarheid de rede oppergezag toekende.

In de loop der jaren zijn verschillende verklaringen voor het gedrag van deze kalief te berde gebracht. De volgende drie zijn de meest gangbare, ofschoon ze niet zonder voorbehoud zijn geaccepteerd. Zelfs degenen die de verschillende interpretaties hebben aangedragen zijn er niet geheel van overtuigd dat één ervan of een combinatie van meerdere een gerede verklaring vormt. De handelwijze van de kalief wordt verklaard door (1) zijn affiniteiten met de Mu'tazila; (2) zijn 'Alidische/Shi'itische sympathieën; en (3) zijn visie op de autoriteit van de kalief.

In de onderhavige studie heb ik deze verklaringen opnieuw bestudeerd op basis van de volgende drie uitgangspunten: (a) de uitvaardiging van de doctrine van de geschapen Koran wordt beschouwd als een op zichzelf staande gebeurtenis, los van de instelling van de *miḥna*; (b) de beweegredenen die de kalief gehad zou kunnen hebben voor de uitvaardiging van de doctrine en de instelling van de *miḥna* staan centraal; en (c) er wordt gebruik gemaakt van een zo groot mogelijke verscheidenheid aan primaire Arabische bronnen – 72 in totaal. Het resultaat van dit onderzoek staat de volgende conclusies toe.

(1) De eerste verklaring (in deze studie *Proposition I* genoemd) schrijft de uitvaardiging van de doctrine en de instelling van de *miḥna* toe aan al-Ma'mûns sympathie voor de Mu'tazilieten en zijn affiniteit met Mu'tazilitische denkbeelden. Er zijn aanwijzingen dat de kalief inderdaad intiem was met een aantal Mu'tazilieten. Hij onderhield echter ook nauwe banden met mensen die niet Mu'tazilitisch of zelfs anti-Mu'tazilitisch waren. De schaarse gegevens die we hebben over de theologische positie van de kalief geven geen aanleiding hem te kenmerken als een Mu'taziliet. Bovendien was in die tijd de idee van een geschapen Koran niet uitsluitend een Mu'tazilitisch denkbeeld. Het voorgaande sluit niet uit dat Mu'tazili-

tische invloeden hebben bijgedragen aan al-Ma'mûns beslissing de *miḥna* in te stellen. Er is echter geen reden deze invloeden, als die er al waren, te beschouwen als de drijvende kracht achter de handelwijze van de kalief, laat staan ze te zien als de oorzaak van zijn handelen.

(2) De tweede verklaring (*Proposition II*) is gebaseerd op de veronderstelling dat de kalief affiniteiten had met de Shi'ieten en dat deze affiniteiten de drijfveer vormden voor zijn handelingen. Het is waar dat een aantal van al-Ma'mûns gezichtspunten overeenkomt met de ideeën van de Shi'ieten, vooral waar het de kenmerken van de *imâm* betreft. Zulk een gelijkgestemdheid is echter in het geheel niet vreemd. Het Shi'isme was immers – ofschoon nog amorf in die tijd (zie conclusie 3) – een wijdverbreide stroming waarin talrijke ideeën werden ontwikkeld. Dat de denkbeelden van de kalief over zaken die voor hem van belang waren – zoals de kwestie van de positie van de leider van de Gemeenschap – overeenkwamen met Shi'itische ideeën, zou van invloed kunnen zijn geweest op de gebeurtenissen. Ook hiervoor geldt echter dat er geen direct verband is aan te tonen tussen de beweegredenen van de kalief en zijn eventuele affiniteiten met Shi'itische ideologieën. Ik ben er evenmin in geslaagd een verband te vinden tussen het Shi'isme enerzijds en de doctrine van de geschapen Koran of de *miḥna* anderzijds.

(3) *Proposition III* is de meest houdbare van de drie verklaringen gebleken. Volgens deze stelling liet al-Ma'mûn zich in zijn handelen leiden door zijn vastbeslotenheid te bekrachtigen dat de drager van het kalieflijke ambt net zo gerechtigd was de onbetwiste en algemeen erkende autoriteit te zijn op het gebied van religieuze aangelegenheden als hij de hoogste leider van de Gemeenschap was in wereldse zaken. De grondige bestudering van een serie teksten, die in de onderhavige studie voor het eerst bij elkaar zijn gebracht, heeft aangetoond dat al-Ma'mûn deze mening was toegedaan en daar met indrukwekkende consistentie aan vasthield gedurende zijn hele regeringsperiode.

Gezien vanuit het perspectief van al-Ma'mûn was het waarschijnlijk een aangenaam toeval dat de Shi'ieten in die tijd een invulling gaven aan het begrip "*imâm*" die overeenkwam met zijn eigen definitie van "kalief". Zo kwam het hem waarschijnlijk ook goed uit dat hij voor zijn doeleinden een doctrine kon nemen (die van de geschapen Koran), waarover zowel binnen Mu'tazilitische kring als daarbuiten uitvoerig gedebatteerd werd. Echter, de opvatting was geheel en al "Ma'mûnitisch", in die zin dat al-Ma'mûn datgene wat hij wellicht zag als een echo van het verleden waarin de Profeet en zijn opvolgers de Islam in alle facetten vertegenwoordigden, combineerde met eigentijdse stromingen waarin velerlei ideeën opborrelden. Dit alles diende om het naar zijn mening dreigende verval van 's rijks voorspoed te stuiten.

Deze Ma'mûnitische opvatting komt tot uitdrukking in de opzet van de *miḥna*, in de keuze van de kalief om voor zijn inquisitie vooral de *'ulamâ'* tot doelwit te maken, in de manier waarop hij de doctrine van de geschapen Koran als middel aanwendde en in zijn onmiskenbare partijdigheid voor de 'Alieden die de geleerden altijd zo geboeid heeft. Deze punten worden één voor één besproken, waarbij moet worden opgemerkt dat geen enkele beschouwing vrij is van speculatie. De beperkte hoeveelheid vaststaande feiten waarover de geleerden beschikken laat geen alternatief. Ook ik moet mij daarbij neerleggen. Ik ben er echter wel van overtuigd dat mijn versie open en duidelijk is, interne consistentie vertoont en een plaats toekent aan de vier verschijnselen zojuist genoemd in de context van *Proposition III*.

Miḥna. Het doel van de *miḥna* was niet het dwingend opleggen van een bepaalde religieuze doctrine, noch was de verklaring dat de Koran geschapen was een plotselinge ingeving om de status van het Boek vast te stellen. De *miḥna* was bedoeld om de klok terug te draaien naar de tijd dat het gezag van Muḥammad —wiens profeetschap, naar de mening van al-Ma'mûn, tot het erfgoed van de kalief behoorde— soeverein was en dientengevolge dan ook belichaamd werd in de kalief. Het werkelijke doel van de *miḥna* werd versluierd door "discussies" over de doctrine van de geschapen Koran. Dit blijkt bijvoorbeeld uit de verandering die de kalief in zijn argumentatie aanbracht nadat hem ter ore was gekomen dat instemming met de doctrine op verzet stuitte. Op dat moment werd de doctrine naar de achtergrond geschoven en kwam de nadruk te liggen op het thema van "gehoorzaamheid" aan de kalief. Om deze gehoorzaamheid te bewerkstelligen onderwierp al-Ma'mûn zijn tegenstanders aan een spervuur van dreigementen en beschuldigde hen daarenboven van ondermijning van "Gods religie" en de goede zaak van de Islam.

'Ulamâ'. De kalief richtte zijn aandacht niet op de landeigenaren, handwerkslieden, militaire leiders, belastinginners of de aanhangers van een bepaalde groep; het doelwit dat hij uitkoos werd gevormd door de *'ulamâ'* —rechters en *ḥuhûd*, traditionariërs en *fuqahâ'*. In de tijd van al-Ma'mûn waren de *'ulamâ'* er inmiddels in geslaagd voor zichzelf terrein af te bakenen en de feitelijke autoriteit in religieuze aangelegenheden op te eisen. Daarmee hadden zij het gezag van de kalief beperkt tot wereldse zaken. Al-Ma'mûn was vastbesloten dit teniet te doen. In een reeks brieven aan de gouverneur van Baghdad gelastte hij de *miḥna*. Dat de eerste pogingen zijn tegenstanders te onderwerpen mislukten (direct volgend op de eerste, nogal vage brief), sterkte de kalief in zijn vastberadenheid; hij veranderde zijn tactiek, blijkend uit, onder andere, zijn dreigementen, zijn bevel specifieke tegenstanders aan een ondervraging te onderwerpen en zijn instructies aan de gouverneur vooral geen tijd te verliezen alvo-

rens de namen van de *'ulamâ'* die hun instemming met de doctrine hadden gegeven publiekelijk bekend te maken.

De kalief had geen reden andere groepen in de *miḥna* te betrekken; het waren immers alleen de *'ulamâ'* die zijn felbegeerde alomvattende autoriteit in de weg stonden. Bovendien had de keuze juist dit segment van de samenleving tot doelwit te maken nog een extra voordeel: omdat de *'ulamâ'* zo actief waren op het gebied van religie, was instemming hunnerzijds gelijk aan erkenning dat de kalief inderdaad religieus gezag genoot en tegelijkertijd zetten zij zichzelf, door hun eigen onderwerping, buiten spel.

De doctrine. Het blijft onduidelijk waarom de kalief in 212/827 de doctrine van de geschapen Koran uitvaardigde. Door gebrek aan feitelijk materiaal tasten we evenzeer in het duister over de reden waarom al-Ma'mûns keuze nu juist viel op dit specifieke onderwerp. De doctrine in kwestie had echter bepaalde merites. Ten eerste waren de regels die de kalief had opgesteld voor het "debat" beperkt tot een simpel "zeg me of je het met me eens bent of niet" – een valkuil waarvoor de doctrine van de geschapen Koran zich uitstekend leende. Ten tweede moest de test te maken hebben met een theologisch onderwerp, aangezien het de kalief boven alles ging om autoriteit in religieuze aangelegenheden; de *miḥna* werd dan ook gericht tegen de mensen die deskundigheid op dit gebied voor zichzelf opeisten. Een derde kenmerk dat de doctrine van de geschapen Koran zo uitermate geschikt maakte, was de "status" – of liever, het gebrek aan status – van dit onderwerp in de Koran zelf. Er wordt niet rechtstreeks over gesproken in het Boek, maar de indirecte aanwijzing die al-Ma'mûn eruit haalde was volmaakt consistent en kon amper worden weerlegd op basis van logische argumenten. Hij dreigde de *'ulamâ'* die volhardden in tegenstand te onderwerpen aan strenge maatregelen van allerlei aard en daagde hen uit zijn logica met logica te weerleggen. Als zij dat vervolgens niet wilden of konden doen, werden zij beschuldigd van onwetendheid en te kijk gesteld als de onbekwame zegslieden die al-Ma'mûn hen wilde laten zijn. Op die manier rechtvaardigde de kalief zijn claim dat alleen de ambtsdragers van het kalifaat "aan wie God geïnspireerde kennis heeft overgedragen" authentieke zegslieden konden zijn.

'Alieden. Al-Ma'mûn vereerde 'Alî b. Abî Ṭâlib, zag regelmatig terugkerende 'Alidische opstanden, zelfs tegen zijn eigen bewind, door de vingers en gaf gedurende zijn hele leven op nog vele andere manieren blijk van een onmiskenbare begunstiging van leden van de andere tak van de Banû Hâshim, de neven van de 'Abbâsieden, de 'Alieden. Al-Ma'mûns affectie voor de 'Alieden was wellicht oprecht, maar het is waarschijnlijk dat hij hen vooral ook wilde herintegreren in de heersende stroming binnen het kalifaat om zodoende de fundamenten van het ambt te versterken

en de banden met het sacrale te benadrukken. Al-Ma'mûns benoeming in 201/817 van de "meest geleerde, meest vrome en meest verdienstelijke" man van het "Huis van de Profeet", 'Alî al-Ridâ, tot erfgenaam, moet in het licht van het bovenstaande worden beschouwd. Dat al-Ma'mûn de "verdiensten" van de toekomstige kalief nauwkeurig omschreef en aan de kring waaruit het nageslacht hem kon kiezen de 'Alidische tak van het Huis van de Profeet toevoegde, heeft implicaties van direct belang voor de conclusies hier ter sprake. Ten eerste bracht al-Ma'mûn de Moslims (zijn 'Abbâsidische familie incluis) in herinnering dat het belangrijkste criterium voor legitimiteit werd gevormd door de band van het kalifaat met de grondlegger van de Islamitische religie, de profeet Muhammad, en niet door eenzijdige dynastieke belangen – een punt waaraan de kalief nog zeker zeventien jaar na de benoeming van 'Alî al-Ridâ heeft vastgehouden. Ten tweede introduceerde hij de idee van "verdiensten" – een criterium dat hij wellicht ook heeft gehanteerd toen hij zijn broer en niet zijn zoon verkoos tot opvolger – om zodoende het voortbestaan van het kalifaat als de "bewaker van de Islam" zeker te stellen.

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